We see the Earth.

White pops blossom on the surface -- they could be nuclear explosions from this distance -- but moments later ships, huge, intricate space-freighters come roaring from the surface, passing camera with a thunder of gas and flame.

We hear a woman's voice:

VOICEOVER
Earth-That-Was could no longer sustain our numbers, we were so many.

We see a solar system; a sun like our own, surrounded by many more planets than ours, they in turn surrounded by moons. The ships roar past us toward the system.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
We found a new galaxy: dozens of planets and hundreds of moons, each one terraformed to support human life. To be new Earths.

We see a giant terraforming station; a round, bunker-like complex many miles across, air billowing from it, electricity running over it. The planet it is buried in is shaking, transforming.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
The process took decades. But in the end we had more than enough room for everyone, and generations to come.

We see a futuristic megalopolis, gleaming and cool.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
The Central Planets were the first settled and the most advanced, embodying civilization at its peak.

We see an empty desert plain. -- then pull way out to see the entire planet -- and further, to see that we're on the edge of the galaxy.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
Life on the outer planets and the border moons is much more primitive, and difficult. That's why the Central planets formed the Alliance, so that everyone can enjoy the comfort and enlightenment of true civilization. That's why we're fighting the War for Unification.

During the above the picture of the galaxy becomes a little fuzzier, transparent -- and we see the woman speaking the voiceover. She is a TEACHER, and as she steps through the picture we widen to see:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

It's a group of ten-year-olds, very serious and well dressed. The class has the sparseness both of the modern and the older Asian aesthetic. One window shows they are high up in the gleaming city we saw before, the occasional commercial vehicle flying by.

BOY
Why are people fighting against us? Wouldn't they want things to be better?

Chinese accent

TEACHER
That's a very good question. Let's think about that.

GIRL
My guardian says the Independents are all savages and criminals.

TEACHER
Do you think it's that simple?

BOY
Why wouldn't they want our help? Be more advanced... to have our medicines and, and our lawforce...

ANOTHER BOY
I hear they don't live past sixty, and they kill each other for money, and some of them sex with their own kin.

TEACHER
Maddox! You've contributed enough.

THE OTHER BOY
It's true! And they're cannibals!

BOY
That's only Reavers.

GIRL
Reavers aren't real!

BOY
Full well they are! They burn whole cities, and they sharpen their teeth and wear human skins and --

TEACHER
(in Chinese)
<Everyone will stop this gossip right now!>

Her meaning is clear in her tone. (Though people often talk in Chinese here, it is never subtitled, as it is always phrases such as this, where the sentiment is conveyed through the tone. Mostly, it will be used for greetings and cursing.)

The kids pipe down.

TEACHER
(continuing)
I don't think anyone's answered Borodin's question. Why would the Independents be fighting against Unification?

RIVER
They want quiet.

We see her for the first time: A dark, intense little girl, who happens to be writing with one hand and "typing" with the other as she speaks. (Typing consists of holding a long wooden stylus, pointed at both ends, in the middle and tapping either end down different columns of chinese characters on her desktop screen.)

RIVER
(continuing; looking up at the Teacher)
They want it to be quiet again.

TEACHER
River. You said "quiet". Is that all?

RIVER
War is very noisy.

TEACHER
The war will be over soon...

RIVER
It's unrealistic to believe that one governing body can reshape seventy two planets with separate cultural structures in its own image and encounter anything but brutal and earnest resistance. It's unrealistic and it's noisy.

She is still doing her other two tasks as she speaks. The teacher gently takes her stylus from her.

TEACHER
River...

River looks up, frightened.

RIVER
There've been terrible things...

TEACHER
Do you mean Reavers?

River says nothing.

TEACHER
(continuing)
You needn't be frightened, any of you. You won't be seeing any savages here. It's true that life is very hard on the outer rim, and there are bad things out there. But we're in the heart of the Alliance. River. You're always safe here.

She violently PLUNGES the stylus right into the little girl's forehead --

INT. LAB - NIGHT

And we flash cut to the actual present, an older, sixteen year old RIVER sitting in an operating room reclining table, actual needles stuck in her skull (one right where the teacher had stuck her) being adjusted by a technician. A second monitors her brain patterns.

The lab is everything you might fear of science: cold, blue, steel. Insidiously clean.

2ND TECHNICIAN
She's dreaming.

FIRST TECHNICIAN
Nightmare?

2ND TECHNICIAN
Off the charts. Scary monsters.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Let's amp it up. Delcium, eight-drop.

DOCTOR MATHIAS is not instantly likable -- nor gradually, for that matter. A cold man, and more than a little satisfied with himself. Behind him stands a GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR, observing. And making him a little nervous.

The Inspector is in shadow, but his uniform indicates substantial rank, as does the eagle-crested baton -- no longer than a ruler -- that he clutches in one gloved hand.

2ND TECHNICIAN
Confirm delcium, eightdrop at 16:28 on subject oh five eight dash six, River Tam.

The first technician leans over River, clamps on wrist restraints.

FIRST TECHNICIAN
Rollercoaster, little friend. Let's strap you in.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
See, most of our best work is done when they're asleep. We can monitor and direct their subconscious, implant suggestions, triggers... the neural stripping gives them heightened cognitive reception, but it also destabilizes their own reality matrix. So we get readers, genuine readers; look right into your mind. But controlled by us, mentally and physically.

River starts convulsing, mewing in misery. The Inspector starts forward, slowly.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(continuing)
It's a little startling to see, but the results are spectacular. Especially in this case. River Tam is our star pupil. If you go over the logs I really think you'll be impressed.

The Inspector steps into the light. He is rigid, cold, staring at the girl with no emotion at all. His name, as we will very soon learn, is SIMON.

SIMON
I already am.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Her mental capacity is extraordinary. Even with the side-effects.

SIMON
Tell me about them.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Well, obviously, she's not stable... this much work, she... it manifests as borderline schizophrenia... which at this point is the price for being truly psychic.

Simon starts toward her, slowly.

SIMON
Insane, then.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
She has lucid periods, and we hope to improve upon the... I'm sorry, Sir, I have to ask if there's some reason for this inspection.

SIMON
(turning)
Am I making you nervous?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
This subject has been shown to the entire Military Council. I was told their support for this project was unanimous. The demonstration of her power --

The door opens and an orderly wheels a cart of supplies in. He looks shaggy and suspicious, and the Doctor eyes him for a moment. The orderly moves to the back of the room and crouches down, restocking the lower cabinets.

SIMON
(turns back to her)
How is she physically?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Off the charts. All of our readers are conditioned for combat. If we feed her the right subliminal trigger, she could take out a roomful of men twice her size. Is the council considering putting her in the field?

SIMON
I suppose they'll let you know that when they choose to.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I don't feel she's quite ready for the world yet, but soon... she is a wonder, mentally and physically. I take as much credit as I can; our perception enhancements have always improved soldiers' reaction time in combat, but this girl... she is of herself the most graceful creature.

SIMON
Yes. She always did love to dance.

He drops to one knee, slamming his baton to the floor.

ANGLE: THE BATON

As the top pops off like a bouncing betty (the grenade), flying up over Simon and River's heads and then bursting forth in a flat circle of blue energy that bisects the room, flowing through the staff's heads and knocking them all on their asses.

They stir, but not much. Blood drips from their noses.

Simon rushes to River, gently removes the probes from her head and swabs her, whispering:

SIMON
(continuing)
River. wake up. Please, it's
Simon. River. It's your brother.
Simon. We have to --

He whips his head around to see:

ANGLE: THE ORDERLY

Who was bent over, and is now creeping for the alarm.

Simon races across the room as the orderly breaks for the alarm -- Simon **slams** into him and knocks him against the wall, the two of them tumbling -- Simon grabs a metal tray and line-drives the guy's head with it.

He stares a moment at the unconscious man, seemingly shocked, then stands quickly, removing his uniform to reveal an orderly's tunic beneath.

River is suddenly next to him. He jumps a little.

RIVER
Simon.

A beat, as they face each other, Simon fighting emotion.

RIVER
(continuing)
They know you've come.

INT. GUARD STATION - CONTINUING

As a guard looks at a monitor impassively. He mostly resembles a secret service man -- more bureaucrat than thug.

A second man rolls into frame on a chair behind him, also watching the screen.

The first rises, putting his hand on the monitor, revealing that he wears tight blue gloves.

INT. RESEARCH CENTER CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

Simon walks River through the corridor quickly and without hesitation, even though it's sometimes a maze. They approach a pair of double doors.

SIMON
We can't make it upstairs from
here. Can't use the elevators.

RIVER
We're not going to.

He looks at her a moment.

SIMON
That's right.

Simon turns suddenly as he hears footsteps, people heading at them from the other side of the doors.

SIMON
(continuing)
Find a --

But River has, impossibly, scampered up over some lab equipment to the dark top of the corridor, where she holds herself in a perfect split, feet against the walls and outstretched hand holding the sprinkler for support.

The doors burst open and two doctors -- male and female -- pass by, not bothering with Simon the orderly except to say:

DOCTOR
(in Chinese)
<Health to you and yours.>

SIMON
(also in Chinese)
<Your attentions are appreciated.>

A beat, and River drops into frame beside him. He takes her hand and they go through the doors.

INT. /EXT. LOBBY/ATRIUM - MOMENTS LATER

This area is larger, with 'patients' sitting silently at tables, doctors and orderlies coming and going. One patient is crying uncontrollably -- an intern ministers to him.

All of this is backed by windows (and a pair of glass doors) looking into the ATRIUM: a space of no more than twenty feet by twenty feet, with a few depressing ferns giving it its name.

Simon and River arrive at the other side of the room, start making their way toward the atrium.

ANGLE: THE SECURITY AGENTS

As they round the corner from one side, see Simon and River. They reach into their jackets and pull out laser guns.

AGENT #1
All exits are secured. Don't hit the girl.

He fires --

ANGLE: HIS POV

As Simon is momentarily obscured by a passing intern -- who is shot clean in the head with a laser burst and goes down without a squawk.

Simon and River duck and run, the security agents still firing.

Simon bursts through the doors, dragging River with him. He wedges his baton between the handles as the agents approach. They fire at the glass of the doors, but their lasers have no effect.

River looks around her, looks up. The Atrium is really a glorified ventilation shaft -- a small patch of night sky is visible ten stories above them. Wind whips River's hair about as she sees the sky blotted out by a small ship that hovers above them.

ANGLE: THE SHIP

Is not unlike a helicopter in design: small sleek, and quiet.

A section of its underbelly, slightly larger than a gurney, suddenly detaches and drops down the full ten stories, four cables spooling out of the ship to hold it. It comes to within three feet of the ground and stops suddenly.

SIMON
Get on!

He is standing by the window -- and a security agent appears right behind him, PUNCHING the window with all his might. He does this again and it cracks. Again, and the cracks web out around him.

Simon helps River onto the gurney, then jumps on himself as the Security Agent SMASHES through the glass. River stares at him a moment and then is whisked up in the gurney, still on her knees, as Simon stands beside her, holding on to one of the cables, the two of them moving up at breakneck speed, the Security agents scrambling through the window and shooting at the bottom of the gurney to no effect.

AGENT #2
Scramble the birds, subjects are airborne.

The gurney is retracted back into the bottom of the craft, and as it flies off we see a vista of the city at night. It's a wonderland of light, with enough craft flying about for ours to get lost among them fairly quickly.

We see all this from just over the rooftop of this industrial complex. The city, the lights, the disappearing ship.

JUDE (O.S.)
Stop.

The action freezes.

JUDE (O.S.)
(continuing)
Lovely. That's something. Rewind.

The action REVERSES, taking us back to the moment of Simon and River on the gurney just before it rises. Her hair whips in the wind with that unsettling backwards pull.

JUDE (O.S.)
(continuing)
Stop.

There is a motionless beat, just River frozen in that crouch, and JUDE steps through what we now see is a holograph of the event, his face emerging from her own.

Jude is the Government's man. He is thoughtful, a little removed. He wears wire-rimmed glasses and his hair trimmed neat. His suit is too nondescript to be a uniform, too neat to be casual wear.

He crosses away from the holograph and we go WIDE to reveal that we are actually now in:

INT. INSTITUTE RECORDS ROOM - DAY How was this holograph recorded?

-- which is long and bare but for drawers of holographic records, a set-up for watching recordings (where the image of Simon and River floats), and a table with computer and chair. Jude crosses to the table, looks over some papers.

JUDE
It's a grand adventure... halcyon days of Yor... halcyon... Simon Tam.

CLOSE ON: JUDE'S GLASSES

As Simon's history files down in print and pictures -- graduation, security photo from his medical internship -- over one lens of Jude's glasses.

JUDE
(continuing)
Remarkable boy.

The door at the other end of the room opens, and Doctor Mathias storms in, two blue-handed security men (not the ones from the opening) following more slowly, and a young female INTERN closing the door, looking nervously out of her depth.

Mathias looks a bit more grey, a bit more gaunt, than when we saw him last.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Excuse me! No one is allowed in the records room without my express permission.

JUDE
(to himself)
Enter the doctor.
(to Mathias)
Forgive me. I prefer to see the event alone, without bias.

Mathias looks at the holograph -- realizes which one it is.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
How did you even -- you better have clearance from MilCom itself, or I swear to you --

JUDE
(hands him a card)
I'm afraid it's out of their hands now.

Mathias sticks the card into a computer slot, pulls it out. His eyes go wide at what he sees. Jude presses a thumb to the screen, causing a verification beep.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
My God...

JUDE
The Parliament will of course deny my involvement, should this come to light. If anyone bothered to ask, they'd deny my very existence.
(more)

JUDE (cont'd)
Not unlike this facility. It is our lot to serve in shadow.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(looking at the screen)
There isn't a listing for a name or --

JUDE
Jude. Let's talk about the Tams.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I assume you have the status logs...

JUDE
She was your only real success story. A prodigy -- more. A phenomenon. And one day, almost a year ago, her older brother walked in and took her from you.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
It's not quite so simple.

JUDE
I'm very aware of that.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
He came in with full creds. He beat the ap-scan, the retinal... He clearly had help from the Resistance. This was a great coup for them.

JUDE
The Resistance is a bunch of excitable graduate students sitting in doss-houses, drinking Ng-Ka-Pei and nattering on about fascism. There are a few more fanatical strains, who no doubt helped Doctor Tam, but they lost track of him almost as soon as you did.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
All our intelligence indicates strong Anti-Alliance ties --

JUDE
You think the boy risked his life and lost his future over politics? Have you looked at this scan carefully? At his face?

Mathias looks uncertain.

JUDE
(continuing)
It's love, in point of fact. He loved his sister and he knew she was in pain. So he took her somewhere safe.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Do you know where?

JUDE
Not yet.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Why are you here?

JUDE
You mean besides the fact that your agents have worked a cold trail for near eight months? I'm here because the situation is even less simple than you think.
(eyeing him)
Do you know what your sin is, Doctor?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I... I would be very careful about what you --

JUDE
(sadly)
It's pride.

He touches the computer screen and the holographic image jumps to the Doctor and Simon in the lab, Mathias repeating:

DOCTOR MATHIAS
The subject has been shown to the entire military council. I was told their support --

He shuts it off.

JUDE
Did you know that there are two members of that council that have taken their own lives in the last three months?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Taken... what do you mean --

JUDE
I mean just that. Suicides. I never met them til after. One hanged, one a jumper. It would seem they both had something on their minds, something disturbing. Something secret. Even from me. There's no way to know exactly what they were hiding... unless you could read minds.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
River Tam never said anything about... I never heard...

JUDE
I've no wish to know the secret. It's clearly upsetting. But I've read River's transcripts. And it does appear she became much more agitated -- more not very sane --- after she saw the Generals. You had to show her off.

He still has that sadness in his voice. Then, all business:

JUDE
(continuing)
The Parliament suspects she may have this knowledge, even if she is unaware of it.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
You said yourself the Resistance doesn't know where she --

JUDE
It doesn't matter. I'm, I'm being unclear. The girl is not just a loose end. She's the loose end of a power cable. Sparks. Can't risk sparks. I have to kill her now and the brother as well. Because of your sin.

The doctor doesn't know what to say for a moment -- Jude is suddenly much less self-effacing. The energy in the room has changed. Jude starts tidying up his shining metal briefcase.

JUDE
(continuing)
This facility is no longer and never was. River was your best last hope. And she's lost.
(the Doctor starts to protest)
You know, in certain older civilized cultures, when men failed as entirely as you have, they would throw themselves on their swords.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(fed up)
Well, unfortunately I forgot to bring a sword to --

The air rings crisply as Jude pulls his sword from the briefcase. The doctor watches silently as the short sword slides down to become longer, like a stiletto.

JUDE
Log says the girl is a weapon. Trigger the right mnemonic sequence and she goes in to kill mode, Fifty yard perimeter, yes?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I -- ye -- I think that would be... It could actually cause this buried memory to surface. I'm not sure you've thought this through. The girl doesn't have to die --

JUDE
Everybody has to die.
(smiles)
Oh I don't mean everybody in this room.
(smile gone)
The girl can live.

He sweeps the neck of the first agent, slicing his throat with true grace, thrusting at the second as he reaches for his gun and pinning his hand to his heart. He pulls out the sword and the man falls as quietly as the first.

Mathias breaks to get past Jude, shoves the table at him, but Jude is like oil, he cuts the Doctor off and pins him to the wall. They struggle a moment and Jude bunches his fingers and jabs the side of the doctor's spine. Mathias stiffens, suddenly, agonizingly immobile.

Jude steps back, observes the doctor's rigid grimace for a moment.

Almost ceremoniously, he drops to one knee and holds the blade out to one side, hilt to the floor and point tilted toward the doctor. The Doctor stares at it in horror as he paralyzed body begins to tip over toward it.

A moment, and Jude turns toward the terrified intern at the door.

JUDE
(continuing)
Young miss, I'll need the trigger converted to a wave subliminal. Can you do that?

Terrified, she nods.

JUDE
(continuing)
We'll place it on the Cortex, in a commercial or public announcement. Play it enough she'll see it. The Cortex is everywhere. Her brother is a noble heart, but he's also a society child -- they're not living on berries in the mountains. They're somewhere with people. Somewhere she would feel safe, and he could make himself useful, maybe even --

He is almost startled when the doctor's body drops into frame, slowed suddenly by the sword.

It squeaks down the blade, the Doctor unable to cry out, as Jude whispers to him:

JUDE
(continuing)
This is a good death. There's no shame in this, in a **man**'s death. A man who's done fine works. We're making a better world. A better world.

Mathias is dead before Jude finishes. Jude pulls the sword out as the body rolls over. As he wipes the sword down:

JUDE
(continuing)
Young miss, I need you to get to work now. I think I will have a long way to travel.

She leaves and he approaches the holograph, comes very close to River's face, closer still...

JUDE
(continuing)
Where did you go, little girl?

The noise is sucked suddenly out of the room as we black out.

SERENITY

... becomes the name painted on the side of a spaceship, with the same in Chinese behind it.

EXT. SPACE - DAY

It's black out here, and silent, but as soon as this ship hits the atmosphere of the small planet below it, daylight and a deluge of noise will hit us.

We're still moving away from the ship. The name is on the nose, under the bridge. It sticks out from the body of the ship like a craning neck. The body is bulbous, with two propulsion engines sticking out on either side and a giant glowing butt in the back. Green vapor trails of energy flow from the butt. The discerning eye might spot two small shuttles tucked in over the 'wings' of the propulsion engines. The overall effect is of a formidable, if somewhat bedraggled, insect.

It's not the sleekest ship in the 'verse, to be sure.

As it hits atmo, the propulsion engines take over and she starts to rock a bit. The camera comes around the front, at the windows into the bridge, to see the Captain, MALCOLM 'MAL' REYNOLDS, standing at the front, watching.

At that moment, a small piece of the nose breaks off and goes flying past the window.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

[NOTE: Our introduction to the ship and its crew will have the distinction of taking place in **one extended shot**, starting here on the bridge.]

The space is small -- two pilot seats on either side, and a tangle of wires and machinery all about. A group could gather here, but it feels more like a cockpit than the bridge of any great ship.

Mal wears the knee-length brown coat and boots of an old Independent. Gun at his hip. He's not unlike the ship -- he's seen a bit of the world and it left him, emotionally at least, weathered. Right now, though, he's mostly startled.

MAL
What was that?

He's addressing the pilot, WASH, who sits in the pilot's seat. Flight gear and a hawaiian shirt -- not so much the old soldier. Just as startled, though.

WASH
Whoah! Did you see that --

MAL
(in Chinese)
<Of course I saw the -->

The ship bucks --

MAL
(continuing)
Was that the primary buffer panel?

WASH
It did seem to resemble --

MAL
Did the Primary Buffer Panel just fall off my gorramn ship for no apparent reason?

Another buck --

WASH
Looks like.

MAL
I thought Kaylee checked our entry couplings! I have a very clear memory of it --

WASH
Yeah well if she doesn't give us some extra flow from the engine room to offset the burnthrough this landing is gonna get pretty interesting.

MAL
Define Interesting.

WASH
(calm suggestion:)
"Oh god, oh god, we're all gonna die"?

Mal hits the com.

MAL
This is the Captain. There's a little problem with our entry sequence; we may experience slight turbulence and then explode.
(off the com, to Wash)
Can you shave the vector --

WASH
I'm doing it! It's not enough.
(hits com)
Kaylee!

But the com sparks at him, making him jump. Mal is already on his way out.

MAL
Just get us on the ground!

WASH
That part'll happen, pretty definitely.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

The camera has come around and is leading Mal down. On either side of the hall are ladders leading down to crew's personal quarters.

The hulking mercenary JAYNE is coming up out of his bunk as Mal passes. He carries a number of rifles and grenades.

JAYNE
We're gonna explode? I don't wanna explode.

MAL
How many weapons you plan on bringing? You only got the two arms...

JAYNE
I just get excitable as to choice, like to have my options open.

MAL
I don't plan on any shooting taking place during this job.

JAYNE
Well, what you plan and what takes place ain't ever exactly been similar.

MAL
No grenades.

JAYNE
Awwww...

MAL
No grenades.

Mal's first mate, ZOE, enters from the lower level. Her mode of dress and military deference mark her as a war buddy of Mal's.

ZOE
Are we crashing again?

MAL
Is the mule prepped?

ZOE
Nearly. Thought I'd spend my last moments with my husband.

MAL
Don't distract him.

ZOE
Wasn't planning on making out, Sir.

MAL
Soon as he puts us down we go; got a bitty little window a' time here. Give him a peck and help Jayne load the mule up.

ZOE
Yes sir.
(to Jayne)
Are those grenades?

JAYNE
Cap'n doesn't want 'em.

ZOE
We're robbing the place. We're not occupying it.

All that plays in the background as we lead Mal into the:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Which is the communal space of the ship. The dining room table is a big oak plank nailed to the ugly, functional metal table beneath. Vines have been stenciled on the walls. It's homey.

So homey, in fact, that there is food left lying on the table. Mal swipes a dumpling from a plate, pops it in his mouth as another jolt rocks him and sends most of the tableware clattering to the floor.

MAL
(calling out)
Kaylee!

He enters:

INT. AFT HALL/ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
(still calling)
Kaylee, what in the sphincter of hell are you playing at?

The short hall leads to the rust-brown chaos that is the engine room. It's round -- at the very center of the glowing 'butt' we saw from the outside -- and the engine turns slowly in the middle of it. Working around the engine in a forest of wires, sparks and smoke is the mechanic, KAYLEE.

She's way too young and sweetly pretty to be this good at fixing engines. On the other hand, right now the place doesn't exactly look ship-shape. She passes Mal with a slightly impatient smile as he stands in the doorway, raising his voice above the din of the overworked engine.

MAL
(continuing)
We got the Primary Buffer --

KAYLEE
Everything's shiny, Cap'n. Not to fret.

She starts fiddling with machines.

MAL
I'm fretting, Kaylee. I'm in a world of fret.

KAYLEE
That's your nature, is the problem.

MAL
You told me --
(jolt)
You told me the entry couplings would hold for another week!

KAYLEE
That was six months ago, cap'n.

Another figure, that of Shepherd BOOK, an itinerant Preacher, emerges from behind the engine. The collar says Preacher, but his sleeves are rolled up and he's a greasy as Kaylee.

BOOK
I think we'll get her to ground safely enough.

MAL
God tell you that himself? 'Cause he's a terrible one for lies.
(to Kaylee)
My ship don't crash. If she crashes, you crashed her.

KAYLEE
Well you could help me out, captain...

MAL
What. How.

KAYLEE
The cord wrench over there?

MAL
Yeah?

KAYLEE
Do this --

She mimes hitting herself in the head repeatedly --

KAYLEE
(continuing)
-- a few times? Maybe four?

MAL
(grins)
You're my peach, Kaylee.

Steam and electricity shoot at him, backing him up.

MAL
(continuing)
Don't make us die.

He turns and we see Simon standing right behind him. Simon is a little more seasoned than the last time we saw him, but he still contrasts the Captain entirely in dress and manner. He is still implacably proper. Also pissed.

MAL
(continuing)
Doctor. Guess I need to get innocked 'fore we hit earthside.

SIMON
You do.

Another shake, but Simon never takes his eyes off Mal.

MAL
Bit of a rockety ride. Nothing to worry about.

SIMON
I'm not worried.

MAL
Fear is nothing to be ashamed of, Doc.

SIMON
This isn't fear. This is anger.

MAL
(laughs)
Well, it's kinda hard to tell the one from t'other, face like yours.

SIMON
I imagine if it were fear, my eyes would be wider.

MAL
I'll look for that next time.

SIMON
You're not taking her.

MAL
(brushing past him)
No no, that's not a thing I'm interested in talking over with --

SIMON
She's not going with you. That's final.

MAL
(turning back)
I hear the words "that's final" come out of your mouth ever again, they truly will be.
(turning away again)
This is my boat. And y'all are guests on it.

Where he's heading is down a side corridor that has steps leading down to:

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

Simon is right on his heels as we lead them down the stairs.

SIMON
Guests? I earn my passage, Captain --

MAL
And it's time your little sister learned from your fine example.

SIMON
I've earned my passage treating bullet holes, knife wounds, laser burns...

MAL
The job has some slight hazards --

SIMON
I had to re-attach your ear.

MAL
(smirks)
Yeah. That was...
(not smirking)
...so painful...

SIMON
And now you think you can take my sister on one of your jobs?

MAL
Think I can, want to, will.

The passenger dorm has a time-worn warmth that most of the ship shares. Except, of course, for the:

INT. INFIRMARY - CONTINUING

Into which the two men step. Like Simon, this space has the cold blue precision we might associate with the Alliance. Mal rolls up his sleeve as Simon rummages for a hypo.

SIMON
She's a seventeen year old girl. A mentally traumatized sevente--

MAL
She's a reader. Sees into the truth of things; might see trouble before it's coming. Which is of use to me.

SIMON
And that's your guiding star, isn't it? What's of use.

MAL
(laughs)
Honestly, doctor, I think we may really crash this time anyway.

Simon jabs the inoculation needle into Mal's arm.

SIMON
If you put her to thieving then we get off for good. Find another medic.

MAL
That's your decision. Hell, I never expected you two to stay as long as you have. But you know full well you step off this boat it ain't into a world of ease. There's younger girls than River put in greater harm's way every single day.

He starts back into the passenger dorm and right into:

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

The biggest space on the ship, this is where goods are transported. Giant doors sit at the front, which will open upon landing to reveal a lowering ramp. There are also smaller bay doors in the floor. Catwalks surround the space, leading up at the front to the foredeck hall. We've come all the way through Serenity now.

MAL
Now things get thick down there I will keep her from the fray, but she's comin'. Best you let her know.

Simon looks at the Captain a moment, then starts up the steps to the catwalk. Mal moves to the middle of the bay and looks up. As the camera begins to rise, we tilt up to see the Mule, a four-man hovercraft hanging from chains near the ceiling. Jayne and Zoe are tossing duffle bags into it.

MAL
(continuing)
Zoe, is Wash gonna straighten this boat out before we get flattened?

ZOE
Like a downy feather, sir. Nobody flies like my mister.

The camera picks up Simon's feet as they enter foreground on the catwalk, and track with them to find:

SIMON
River...

She's lying on her side, looking straight at us. A loose summer dress draped over her small frame.

RIVER
I know. We're going for a ride.

The camera finally settles, as River continues to stare.

EXT. DESERT GULCH - DAY

Serenity settles down, fairly gently, as the cargo bay door at the front begins to open.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

The chains are hoisted back up into the ceiling of the ship. The mule floats just above the floor, Jayne piling in next to River in the back. Everybody is moving and talking at once.

MAL
(to Kaylee)
You get Serenity prepped, Kaylee. Apt to be going a mite faster'n we were coming.

KAYLEE
I do know the drill, <my beloved Captain>. We'll patch her together if you **promise** we can use some of our illgots to buy parts. **New** parts.

ZOE
(to Jayne)
You're gonna have to choose. We can't take all this weight, not if the haul's half what we hope.

JAYNE
I'll just take these, then. They make the best impression.

SIMON
Now, River, you stay behind the others. If there's fighting you drop to the floor or run away. It's okay to leave them to die.

River puts on a huge pair of goggles, looks at her brother.

RIVER
I'm the brains of the operation.

MAL
Let's get underway, Zoe.

Zoe taps her earpiece.

ZOE
(to Wash)
Can you hear us, Baby?

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is still at the helm:

WASH
You're in my head like a great idea. Come back safe.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

ZOE
Always do.

Simon moves next to the front of the craft.

SIMON
Captain, I'll ask you one last time...

MAL
Kinda figured you would. Listen, I'm taking your sister under my protection here. If anything happens to her, anything at all, I swear to you I will get very choked up. Honestly. There could be tears.

He peels out, leaving Simon fuming.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The ship, and smoldering Simon, dwindle in the distance as the craft glides along the desert.

ZOE
Why do you do that? This is a milk-run, you just make him worry more.

MAL
I don't know. Something about that boy just makes you wanna poke at him.

Jayne, in the back with River, lets out a big-throated war-whoop.

JAYNE
YEAAHHH!!! Crime and violence! 'Bout damn time we had ourselves a job! This is gonna be all kinds of fun!

MAL
It's a **job**, Jayne. You follow orders and you keep your head. We're gonna run this one simple and sweet.

RIVER
(to herself)
No we're not...

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Simon watches the mule go. Kaylee sidles up to him...

KAYLEE
Don't mind the Captain none, Simon. I know he'll look out for her.

SIMON
It's amazing. I bring River all the way out to the raggedy edge of the 'verse so she can hide from the Alliance by **robbing banks**.

KAYLEE
It's just a little Trading Station. They'll be back 'fore you can spit. Not that you spit...

It's pretty easy to tell what an awful crush Kaylee has on Simon. Unless, of course, you're Simon.

SIMON
(muttered Chinese)
<An endless hell of snakes and vomit.>
(slightly louder English)
I should have gotten her off this boat months ago.

KAYLEE
(shyly leading:)
But, you know, you didn't...

SIMON
No.

KAYLEE
You conjure there might be some reason y'ain't left yet...?

He looks into her eyes.

SIMON
There's a reason.
(beat)
I'm a moron.

He stalks off. She watches him go, crestfallen.

KAYLEE
That's a theory I'm comin' round to...

EXT. DESERT - DAY

As the mule shoots through small gulches, headed for the still unseen town.

ANGLE ON: RIVER -- as she stares over the side at the ground passing beneath them.

Zoe looks ahead as Mal drives. They hit a decent bump -- even hovering, they're rocked a bit.

ZOE
We can build worlds. We can't build roads?

MAL
Check the map, see how we're doing.

As they talk, Zoe pulls out a piece of clear acetate, with diagrams on it that shift at her touch.

ZOE
Pretty tiny township we're aiming at. You sure Fanty and Mingo got this one right?

MAL
Backwater burg's a perfect layover point for Alliance payroll. Fanty and Mingo aren't pleasant by any definition, but they're good for intel. I'm sniffin' at a score here.

ZOE
If this job is so shiny, why'd they hire us? Coulda kept it in house.

MAL
Because we're the best. You don't send some skimmer in a top-knot never been out of the city on a job like this, you send the pros. That's us.

JAYNE
(leaning forward)
River's touching me. She keeps coming over to my side.

A beat, as Mal tries to maintain his deflated cool.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

We see it sprawled out before and below us, just as the hovercraft comes into from one side and stops, the gang also observing, Zoe checking against her map.

The town is set out like a spoked wheel: streets radiating out in a circle around the center, which is a large church. The place embodies the lives of folk out here: adobe and wood mix with metal and plastic -- whatever's on hand to build with. The only pristine edifice is the Church, perfectly round and rising some two stories above the rest of town. Right now the streets are mainly empty.

Zoe checks her map once more. Points.

ZOE
Trading station.

JAYNE
Where's all the people at?

MAL
Church, more'n'like. It's Sunday on this moon.

JAYNE
Shiny.

Mal turns back to River.

MAL
You ready to go to work, darlin'?

A beat as she pulls off her goggles, looking about her.

RIVER
There's no pattern to the pebbles here, they're completely random. I tried to count them but you drove too fast. Hummingbird.

MAL
Okay. Fine. Let's go.

INT. TRADING STATION - DAY

BOOM! The door slams open and **BOOM!**, Zoe shoots out the camera above her head with her sawed-off as Mal and Jayne stride in behind her.

There's maybe fifteen people in the place. It's a combination post-office, general store, bank, and most other things. The people are divided between store workers, farm-folk and a couple dirt poor kids.

MAL
Hands and knees and heads bowed down! Everybody, now!

Two men who appear to be farm folk rush Mal and the others. Mal draws on the elder one and he stops dead in his tracks. Mal's gun is long, not unlike Civil War era issue, but very much new in design.

The other tries to tackle Jayne, which is not necessarily a great idea. Jayne clotheslines him so hard he spins right upside-down -- and Jayne grabs him by the legs and CRACK! -- bounces his head right off the floor, knocking him out cold.

MAL
(continuing)
Y'all wanna be looking very intently at your own belly buttons. I see a head start to rise, violence is gonna ensue.

The guy who rushed Mal complies along with everyone else. Jayne dumps his catch on the floor and rips open his dirty shirt to reveal an Alliance uniform.

JAYNE
Looks like this is the place.

He looks up at Mal, who motions for Zoe to open the front door.

She does, and River steps in.

ANGLE: RIVER'S FEET -- walking slowly among the hunched-over customers as Mal addresses them.

MAL
You've probably already guessed we mean to be thieving here, but what we are after is not yours. We're after the vault, and the Alliance military payroll sittin' inside it. That shouldn't concern any of you. You just keep to your knees, take this time to stretch out your neck some, maybe think about your loved ones, if anybody loves you.

As he is speaking, Jayne is scrambling to the back office, finding the small vault locked.

JAYNE
She's locked up.

ANGLE: RIVER

Suddenly looks around, perturbed.

CLOSE ON: a young tough.

River looks up at Zoe, alarmed, and silently points to the man. He is slowly reaching for his weapon, concealed in his belt.

He gets his gun out and finds Zoe's sawed-off nuzzling his cheek.

ZOE
You know what the definition of a hero is? It's someone who gets other people killed. You can look it up later.

He drops his weapon, slides it across the floor.

MAL
(noticing the gun)
One of you has the code to that vault. You might make yourself known at this point...

Nobody moves.

MAL
(continuing)
Okay, there's a couple of things I'd like to make clear. First, we don't wanna hurt anybody. Second, my large friend over here really **does** wanna hurt somebody. He kinda craves violence.

JAYNE
It's a flaw in my character.

MAL
It is a little disturbing. So I strongly suggest the trade agent make themselves known now, or my boy'll picking victims at random.

JAYNE
I'd like to mention I also hit women.

MAL
Good point, let's factor that in. For the last time, one of you has the code...

River has been furrowing her brow, suddenly points to an older man in front of her. Mal looks at her, "are you sure?", and she nods with comical emphaticness.

He knees by the old man...

MAL
(continuing)
And my feminine intuition tells me it's you.

He hauls the fellow up, tosses him roughly toward the vault. Zoe follows, Jayne staying with the populace.

TRADE AGENT
This is just a crop moon, don't think you'll find what you --

MAL
(in Chinese)
<Shut up and make us wealthy.>

the old man punches in the code. The vault opens slightly.

ANGLE: FROM INSIDE THE VAULT

Which is just a tiny glorified wall safe. We see a couple of bundles of bills, some scattered coin. Really unimpressive. Jayne and Zoe are behind the captain, peering in.

ZOE
At last. We can retire and give up this life of crime.

JAYNE
My urge to do violence is gettin' more pronounced.

MAL
If I teach you nothing else lo these many years, you will need to grasp the difference between a safe --

Mal reaches in, and up out of sight. Pulls a strong lever down -- as soon as it clicks into place the floor -- right by where Zoe and Jayne are opens, a six foot hole appearing, stairs leading to a corridor, all gleaming metal and blue light.

MAL
(continuing)
-- and a vault.

Zoe smiles. Jayne peers down as Mal addresses the Trade Agent.

MAL
(continuing)
Is there a fed down there? Be truthful.

TRADE AGENT
Y'all are Browncoats, hey? Fought for independence?

MAL
War's over. We're all just folk now. Someone down there?

The agent nods. Mal leans over the edge.

MAL
(continuing)
Listen up! We are coming down to empty that vault!

The voice of a young Alliance grunt comes up from beyond where the stairs lead.

GUARD (O.S.)
You have to give me your authorization password!

Jayne impatiently fires a burst of machine-gun fire down into the hole. A beat...

GUARD
Okay...

MAL
(calling down)
We in for any surprises down there?

As if in reply, the guard's shotgun slides down to the bottom of the stairs. Mal looks at Zoe and they head down into:

INT. VAULT - CONTINUING

Which is as modern as something off the Central Planets. A short corridor leads to a real vault door, that the guard is already opening. Behind that door, a few bags of the real deal: neatly stacked cash, waiting to be robbed.

INT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

We move in on River as something crosses her face. Worry. Something not right.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A WOMAN carrying a bucket and her nine year old SON are standing by the church, looking at the trading station a few buildings away.

SON
Repeater.

WOMAN
It did sound summat like gunblast... maybe you aught tell Lawman, never know...

She turns and right by her, in the shadow of the church, is a man.

Mostly. He is hideously disfigured, a combination of self-mutilation and the bubbling red of radiation poisoning. His clothes are a shamble of rags, his eyes pinpoints of glazed madness.

We get about three eighths of a second to see this before he buries a blade in her face.

INT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

River SCREAMS and flops onto her back, pinned by revelation.

Others look at her, concerned, as Jayne makes his way to her.

JAYNE
What the hell is up? You all right? What's goin' on?

He holds her, as she whispers, wide-eyed...

RIVER
Reavers.

INT. VAULT - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe is hauling out the last of five bags as Mal talks to the guard:

MAL
Now the leg is good, it'll bleed plenty and we avoid any necessary organs...

GUARD
I was thinking more of a graze...

MAL
Well you don't want it to look like you just gave up...

GUARD
No, I get that.

JAYNE (O.S.)
MAL!

He barrels down into the vault corridor.

MAL
(to Zoe)
Every heist, he's gotta start yelling my name --

JAYNE
Mal! Reavers! The girl's pitchin' a fit. They're here or they're comin' soon.

He is already loading up with bags as Mal thinks quickly.

MAL
(to Zoe and Jayne)
Get on the mule.
(to the guard, pointing to the vault)
Does that open from the inside?

GUARD
Whah -ah- yes...

MAL
You get everyone upstairs in there and you seal it. Long as you got air you don't open up, you understand?

GUARD
I -- Buh I --

Mal is in his face, dark and huge, a completely different presence:

MAL
GET THEM INSIDE THE VAULT.

EXT. TRADING STATION - DAY

The doors burst open, Jayne and Zoe coming out first, Mal behind with River in hand. She is freaked, in her own space.

Jayne and Zoe throw the bags on --

MAL
Take the wheel, Zoe --

JAYNE
You see 'em? Anybody see 'em?

-- and jump on themselves, Mal scanning the area as he hands River up to Zoe's care. As the craft powers up, slowly rising, the young man Zoe kept from trying to pull his weapon bursts out of the station. Our gang is just starting to head out as he comes up to them, tries to grab on the back --

YOUNG MAN
Take me with you!

MAL
Get in the vault with the others --

YOUNG MAN
I can't stay here! Please!

MAL
It's too many. Drive, Zoe.

YOUNG MAN
PLEASE!

MAL
Drive!

And as he says it as Reaver craft ROARS over their heads. It's nearly the size of Serenity, but it's nothing like her. Torn apart, belching smoke -- a welded conglomeration of ruined ships, painted for war. Predator, pure.

Zoe's face is set with unhappy determination as she floors it, shooting out and leaving the young man in the dust.

A smaller craft, a skiff about twice the size of the Mule, shoots out from around a corner and follows the mule. It's also tricked out with paint and skulls, and has a swamp-boat canopy on top, so we can't see the people riding it very well.

The skiff slows as it comes abreast of the young man. He tries to run back into the store but a dark figure from inside the boat literally harpoons him, pulling him back toward the craft.

MAL
(continuing; to Zoe)
Stop.

JAYNE
Don't stop! Are you moonbrained?

But Mal has drawn his gun. He nudges a lever with his thumb and a cartridge pops back slightly with a whirring click.

ANGLE: THE YOUNG MAN

Kicking and struggling as arms grab him to pull him into the skiff.

Mal fires twice.

The young man takes both bullets in the chest, slumps down dead.

MAL
Go.

From the side, a Reaver comes SCREAMING at them on foot. He is inches from them when Jayne whirls and fires one of his more impressive rifles at the savage, knocking him back.

ANGLE: THE EDGE OF TOWN

As the mule shoots past the last building, we see a **second skiff** shoot out from behind the buildings of the adjacent street, right abreast of our gang. The two vessels fly side by side, the first skiff shooting into frame behind, following.

ANGLE: THE CENTER OF TOWN

We see the church as the first ship and an even larger one come to hover over it, Reavers dropping down on cable lines to swarm into it.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The mule and two skiffs are booking through the rocky terrain. The skiff abreast of the mule swings closer, but Jayne stands and peppers it with automatic fire and it swings away. There is sporadic return fire.

JAYNE
How come they ain't blowing us out of the air?

MAL
They wanna run us down. The up-close kill.

River is squashed down on her back, being very small.

RIVER
They want us alive when they eat us.

JAYNE
Boy, sure would be nice if we had some **grenades**, don'tchya think?

Mal says nothing, fires at the one behind them. It's getting closer.

ZOE
Wash, baby can you hear me?

INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is in a frenzy of switchflipping, prepping for take-off.

WASH
We're moments from air. I'm reading you got somebody behind you?

We intercut Wash and Zoe at this point:

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

ZOE
Reavers.

WASH
(blanching)
<merciless hell...>

ZOE
We're not gonna reach you in time.

WASH
Just keep moving, honey. We're coming to you.
(calls out behind him)
Kaylee! We better be running fine back there! There's Reavers coming!

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

On Kaylee and Book, as they take that in.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As she lifts off the ground and starts heading toward the others.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The skiff behind is closer still. Mal fires at it but the hull is bulletproof.

Jayne does better with his monster-rifle, as he he hits hull on the other skiff and black smoke pours out of it.

JAYNE
You like that?

A harpoon **thwinngs** through the air from the following skiff and **SHHNNK!** Goes through Jayne's leg. The moment it goes through, four little arms open up, so when the line is pulled taught, the harpoon grips the leg and pulls --

Jayne goes flying off the back of the Mule, Mal just grabbing him as the harpoon line reels slowly tighter --

MAL
Grab on!

Jayne grabs the Mule, holding on, legs dangling, pulled out between the two vessels as Mal slams a new cartridge into his pistol.

JAYNE
I won't get et! You shoot me if they take me!

The front skiff suddenly veers at them and SLAMS into the mule, Zoe barely keeping the thing from flipping -- which she does with one hand, the other busy shooting at the skiff.

Mal steadies himself and takes aim, seemingly at Jayne --

JAYNE
(continuing)
Well don't shoot me **first**!

Mal fires. Again. Steadies himself for one more...

ANGLE: THE LINE holding the harpoon is split by Mal's third shot.

The mule surges forward as Jayne, no longer stretched between the ships, is suddenly dragging on the ground, holding on with even greater difficulty. Mal holsters his gun, hauling Jayne back in as River bounds into the front to make room.

JAYNE
(continuing)
Rutting pigs! Where's --

And River is holding out his next weapon to him before he can ask for it.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE DESERT - CONTINUING

Serenity rushes across the desert floor, not much higher off it than the smaller crafts.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash pilots with serene precision as Simon enters the bridge at top speed.

SIMON
Where are they? how --

WASH
Doc, I'd love to chat, but I need you to get down to the cargo bay right now.

SIMON
Are they all right?

WASH
NOW, Doc, or they sure as hell won't be.

Simon takes off.

WASH
-- (continuing; to Zoe)
How's she handling, baby?

INT. DESERT - CONTINUING

ZOE
Wish you were here.

WASH
Try to get some distance on 'em. You come to the flats, I want you to swing round. Gonna try a Barn Swallow.

Zoe looks over as the skiff next to them catches fire badly from Jayne's engine hit. It shakes, then veers straight at us.

MAL
They're gonna ram us!

JAYNE
They ain't even jumpin' out...

ANGLE: FROM BEHIND THE BURNING SKIFF as it heads for the mule at an angle, getting closer, closer -- and a wall of rock comes between them, the skiff hitting it and exploding.

ANGLE: FROM ABOVE

We see the rocks -- a V jutting out from the ground, creating two paths. The mule continues safely on the left as the fire and debris of the exploded skiff force the second one on to the right.

ZOE
(to Wash)
We got a little time here but we're burning all our fuel.

WASH
Keep it going! Get to the flats and wheel hard!

ANGLE: THE DESERT RAVINE

As the mule bombs past camera -- and a few seconds later the skiff comes over the low ridge, bouncing into rock walls but staying on course after the Mule -- and firing guns now, the up-close kill no longer such a priority.

MAL
Little time gettin' littler...

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash hits the com.

WASH
Simon! Open the loading dock!

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Simon looks very concerned about that idea, but he moves next to the huge sliding doors at the front, hits a couple of buttons.

The door pull open, as the huge ramp beyond them opens down, letting in a huge amount of wind and light. Simon has to hold on, waiting.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The mule reaches the flats, away from the rocks.

WASH (O.S.)
(in Zoe's ear)
Okay, baby, we've talked this through...

ZOE
Talkin' ain't doin'.

She throws the wheel and the mule comes hard about, fishtailing slightly as it faces the oncoming skiff.

WASH (O.S.)
Don't slow down!

ANGLE: THE SKIFF

As it heads for the mule --

ANGLE: THE MULE

As it heads for the skiff -- and Serenity swoops down out of the sky, bay doors open, and comes right up behind it --

The Mule is swallowed by the bigger ship --

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

And only its forward momentum keeps it from being squashed as it flies backwards into the bay, narrowly missing Simon and smashing back into the staircase, sparks and people flying --

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

Serenity tries to get altitude -- but slams right into the oncoming skiff, tearing it apart --

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

A flaming portion of the top flies in, skids to the floor as small fires erupt from the mule as well -- Simon pulls a lever and jets of CO2 shoot out of the walls, creating even more chaos for a moment.

Simon hits the button to start the outer ramp closing, then runs to the mule. The CO2 stops and he find River sitting in her seat, completely unharmed. Zoe is climbing painfully out of the other seat, Mal and Jayne both having been thrown.

SIMON
River?

RIVER
I swallowed a bug.

ANGLE: THE RAMP

As it closes, a HAND grabs the edge of it, and impossibly, a bloodied REAVER starts painfully pulling himself over.

Kaylee runs in, with Book in tow, to see how everyone is. She runs to Simon.

KAYLEE
Are you okay?

MAL
Is **he** okay?

He doesn't say anything else 'cause Kaylee is looking at the ramp, suddenly white --

Mal and the others look as the Reaver is still struggling to get himself over the closing ramp --

Zoe, pissed and limping, hoists her sawed-off -- and a second bloodied Reaver **POPS** into frame in front of her from under the skiff-top. He's on her in a second, knocking her over and pinning her, rearing back to show his burnt and mutilated face, his sharpened teeth -- he bites down and Zoe screams --

Mal grabs him, forearm around the throat, pulls him back, the Reaver thrashes like an animal, Mal pulls his gun and pumps three bullets into his back while still holding him.

Same time, Jayne grabs one of the weapon he left behind and plugs the last Reaver, which stops it halfway over the ramp -- which continues to close, cutting the thing in half.

When it closes, the light and wind do as well. Mal lets the last Reaver drop to the ground, where it twitches, taking too damn long to die.

There is a beat.

Mal moves to the com. Hits it.

MAL
(continuing)
Wash?

WASH (O.S.)
We all here?

MAL
No casualties. Anybody following?

WASH
Negative. We're shiny. Clean getaway -- Out of atmo in six minutes.

MAL
Set course for Beaumonde.

He turns to help Zoe up, but Simon and Book already have.

MAL
(continuing)
First thing is, we get fixed --

Simon suddenly **punches** him in the face, causing Mal to stumble back, in pain, and Simon to shake his hand in pain as well.

MAL
(continuing; in Chinese)
<You wanna bullet? You wanna bullet right in your throat?>

SIMON
You stupid, selfish, son of a whore ---

MAL
I'm a hair's breadth from riddling you with holes, Doctor --

SIMON
"She'll be fine! One simple job."

MAL
She IS fine! Except for bein' still crazy, she's the picture of health!

ZOE
Wasn't for River, we'd probably be left there. She felt 'em coming.

SIMON
Never again. You understand me?

MAL
Seems I remember a talk about you giving orders on my boat.

SIMON
Well sleep easy 'cause we're off your boat for good and all. Just as soon as River gets her share of the bounty.

BOOK
Might be you wanna think on that a spell --

MAL
Hell no. I'm sick a' carrying tourists anyhow. We'll be on Beaumonde in ten hours time, you can pick up your earnings and be on your merry. Meantime you do your job. Patch up my crew.

A beat.

RIVER
They didn't lie down. They never lie down.

She is looking at the Reaver. Everyone does, for a moment.

SIMON
Stay away from the body, River.

MAL
Jayne, you get that leg mended, then dump this crap out the airlock.

He and Zoe head toward the front, to the stairs leading to the bridge, as Simon and Jayne head out the other way. Book and River remain, lost in very different thoughts.

MAL
(continuing; to Zoe)
Doc needs to look at you, too.

ZOE
I wanna see the mister first.

There's something in her tone...

MAL
You got something to say to me?

ZOE
Sir, it isn't --

MAL
Don't be shy, Zoe. You think I oughta beg the Doctor to stay on?

They get up the stairs and enter:

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

ZOE
It ain't them, sir. Back in town. The man on the street...

They stop by Mal's room.

MAL
I had to take him down. What the Reavers woulda done to him before they killed him...

ZOE
I know. That was a piece a' mercy. But before that, him begging us to bring him along...

MAL
We couldn't take the weight. Woulda slowed us down.

ZOE
You know that for certain --

MAL
Mule won't run with five. I shoulda dumped the girl? Or you? Or Jayne?
(considering)
Well, Jayne...

ZOE
Coulda tossed the payload.

MAL
And go to Fanty and Mingo with air in our mitts, tell 'em "here's your share"? They'd set the dogs on us in the space of a twitch, and there we are back in mortal peril. We got to pay them off for setting this job up and we got to have cash ourselves. In case you've not noticed, my beautiful boat ain't exactly up to spec.

ZOE
Sir, I don't disagree on any particular point, it's just... in the time of war, we woulda never left a man stranded.

MAL
Maybe that's why we lost.

She's not happy with the reply. Wash enters from the bridge as Mal starts for his room.

MAL
(continuing)
He wasn't one of ours, Zoe.
(looking at her)
Mule couldn't take the weight.

He kicks the door open and climbs down. Wash reaches Zoe, slides his arms around her.

WASH
Everything Jake, baby?

She rests her head on his shoulder. Eyes still on Mal's room.

ZOE
Yeah. Right as rain.

She turns into him and kisses him. Smiles.

ZOE
(continuing)
That was a close one...

INT. CARGO-BAY - CONTINUING

We see the doors in the floor slide open, a second set below. This is a much smaller bay than the ramp entrance. Pan to see, for a moment, the dead Reaver's face. So unpretty.

Jayne is opening the doors with a keypad on a cable. He and Book start dragging the corpse and a half closer to the doors.

JAYNE
I'll never get it. How's a guy get so wrong? Cuttin' on his own face, rapin' and -- I mean, I'll kill a man in a fair fight... or if I think he's gonna **start** a fair fight, or if he bothers me, or if there's a woman, or I'm gettin' paid -- mostly only when I'm gettin' paid.

BOOK
Your application for sainthood is still under review. I'm hopeful.

JAYNE
Well I sure as hell don't eat nobody! Last ten years, these bungers been poppin' up all over the rim, outta nowhere. Nothin' in 'em but rage.

BOOK
You get to the edge of the system, look out into space and there's nothing. The most nothing a person can see. I've heard said there's men just can't take that. The nothing gets inside them, takes away their humanity. Makes monsters.

JAYNE
I seen it. Looked like more space.

Book pulls out his bible as Jayne tips the bodies over into the little airlock.

JAYNE
(continuing)
You gonna read over that cannibal trash?

BOOK
I am.

JAYNE
Don't see as they got that comin'.

BOOK
I'm not saying they're headed for balmier climes -- I reckon it's the hot place place for such as these, but... Every man and woman born in this 'verse is born with a soul, with a shot at reaching heaven. Whatever happens in between, that sends 'em this way or that... not my concern once they've gone. It's that soul needs someone to speak for it. What might've been.

JAYNE
I guess that's a nice sentiment. Middle part was a little confusing.

He hits the button, shuts the doors.

INT. INFIRMARY - LATER

Simon is packing up some medical supplies as Kaylee follows him about the room, all atwitter.

KAYLEE
The Captain is a moron! I know this from years of knowing this. He's a total backbirth - plus he's shook up from today.

SIMON
It **was** a little exciting...

KAYLEE
And everybody knows he's been extra crabby since Inara left the ship, which letting her go in the first place proves his moronhood! There's no call for **you** to leave too!

SIMON
It's time, Kaylee. It's long past time.

KAYLEE
But where're y'all gonna go? You're wanted fugitives! The Alliance --

SIMON
The Alliance probably stopped looking for us months ago. Anyway, there's gotta be some out of the way place needs a doctor.

KAYLEE
We are exactly that! We're all the time getting shot, or cut up, ears flying this way and that...

SIMON
You can find a competent medic, I'm sure..

KAYLEE
Yeah, but he wouldn't be you.

He stops to look at her. She goes shy of a sudden, not meeting his eye.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
'Sides, now that Inara's gone, River's about my only good girl friend. She don't always make sense of any kind, but she's a dear heart to me.

SIMON
And you to her. Your kindness, of all the things here, is what I...

They've gotten a bit close. Simon thinks better of it.

SIMON
(continuing)
But we knew this was coming. Serenity isn't our home -- the Captain was probably dead right when he...

KAYLEE
He what?

SIMON
He's protective of you. Which is a good thing.

KAYLEE
Yeah it's jolly what'd he do?

SIMON
Well he just mentioned... he happen to say when we first joined up... that if I, oh, ever laid a hand on you he'd shoot me in the throat.

KAYLEE
Oh?

SIMON
Which is only right, right? Think how much worse it would have been if...

KAYLEE
If?

SIMON
I should pack.

KAYLEE
We were gettin' to the "if".

SIMON
River and I have to find our place. That's just the way of it.

Kaylee looks down, defeated.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

We drop back outside to see River sitting by the cargo bay, watching the whole exchange unseen.

After a moment she goes into the now-empty cargo bay. Picking her way around the banged up Mule, she heads up the stairs and down the catwalk. Touching the ship, looking about her. Every touch conveys some memory or energy to her -- a gamut of emotions plays over her face, but the greatest feeling is of comfort. She is, in her own way, at home here.

She comes to the first shuttle, stops. Enters.

INT. FIRST SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

This was, once upon a time, occupied by a Companion. The beautiful decorations have been stripped, almost nothing left of the woman who lived there.

There is still the hard metal frame of what was a bed, places where curtains hung, a couple of incense sticks on the floor. Nothing has been touched or cleaned since the move.

River wanders about, muttering various phrases as she stops in places, soaking up memories...

RIVER
What did I say to you about coming into my shuttle uninvited...?
(wanders)
... last time you get to call me whore...
(wanders)
...this doesn't make you a man...

She touches the bed, lowers herself onto it, touches the air above her, supplicant.

RIVER
(continuing)
Oh god... <that feels so good, just there...>, just there, yes, oh, OH --

MAL
Hey!

She looks over to see the captain in the doorway, looking not at all comfortable.

MAL
(continuing)
Um, I don't see any cause for you be here... doin' that...

RIVER
(complete lack of emotion)
Oh, god, you fill me up, don't stop, it's so good --

MAL
I'm sure it's all kinds a' nice, but you really should stop --

RIVER
This is where she feigned.

MAL
Where she fainted?

RIVER
She lied. Sweet lies, like spun sugar. A web around her eyes. A veil. Can't see in, can't see out.

MAL
Right. Well, it was Inara's job to lie with men, if that's even remotely what you're talking about...

She says nothing, forcing him to make more talk:

MAL
(continuing)
You know, kid, you were great today. Fine little criminal. I'd as soon have you stay as not, your brother and I just don't --

RIVER
Everybody leaves you.

She's up and past him with crisp efficiency.

RIVER
(continuing)
I have things to alphabetize.

He lets her go, looks back at the shuttle. After a moment, he steps in, looking around.

He reaches over and picks up a half-burnt incense stick from the floor. He sees:

ANGLE: A PHOTO

Stuck halfway under the bedframe.

Mal pulls it out. On the back is a small web of circuitry. He flips it over and on the front is a picture of INARA, a remarkably beautiful woman, in this very space back when it was done up nicely. The moment Mal runs his thumb along the side of the picture it starts to move, and we see, held in his hand, a small scene from the not-too-distant past:

INARA
<Merciful Buddha>, Kaylee, are you ever gonna put that capture down?

KAYLEE (O.S.)
We gotta have records of everything! The place is gonna look like a dungeon after you go.

INARA
It'll be fine. Honestly, Kaylee, put that down and help me pack. You must have taken twenty.

KAYLEE
Well, maybe the Captain will want one.

Inara throws a sardonic look that hides regret well.

INARA
I'm sure the Captain would just as soon forget I ever --

And the capture runs out, phasing back to the beginning.

Mal looks at it a moment.

He holds the incense up to his nose, breathes in the smell. Runs his hand along the girder above her bed.... closes his eyes, brings his face close and smells her on the walls --

WASH
So.

Mal starts back, tries to think of something to pretend to be doing.

WASH
(continuing)
We're closing in on Beaumonde, should hit atmo in ten. Thought you might wanna hail Mingo, set up the meet. If you're um, done, ah, smelling the shuttle.

Mal stands there.

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

We see only the snowy mountains in the background, framed by a very Asian-looking roof and pillars. From bottom of frame she rises, climbing steps we don't see, every inch of her steeled with poise and resolve. Her beauty is fluid, her dress elegant, a sort of sari slung over her bare shoulder, but as she crests the staircase and approaches camera, we can see nothing ingratiating in her stare.

As she nears, we find ourselves at waist level, until her hand all but fills the frame, clenched tight.

It opens and a silken kerchief unravels before us. Covered in blood.

We widen to find this woman, INARA, standing before a seated military thug named OBUN. Two of his men, clearly of a local and disorganized militia, drape themselves nearby. To one side stands an older woman, as elegant as -- if more austere than -- Inara. This is the House Priestess, GHEYDRA.

They speak Portuguese, and it **is** subtitled.

OBUN
<You expect me to do your laundry for you?>

INARA
<This belongs to one of our girls. Four of your men stopped her on her way back home -->

OBUN
<I know all about that. It's a separate matter.>

INARA
<She will be bedridden for a month. And she very nearly -->

OBUN
<Those men have been identified and will be dealt with.>

INARA
<How?>

OBUN
<That is not your concern.>

INARA
<Every girl in this house is my concern! Those animals raped her and left her in -->

GHEYDRA
(English now:)
Inara! General Obun is here on a separate matter. If you bring this up now he will think us capricious.

INARA
He thinks us weak!

OBUN
And you think me an uneducated pig who can only speak one language.

INARA
General Obun, you may be sure I have never impugned your linguistics.

He smiles. It's not overly attractive.

OBUN
I have come here as a diplomat, with necessary pomp, I bring gifts, asking in humility for what I may take as I please. Why can we not resolve this?

INARA
Companions are not be bought and sold --

OBUN
Base hypocrisy! Companions sell themselves to anyone they choose --

INARA
To anyone they **choose**. They cannot be forced into any arrangement against their will, that is guild law.

OBUN
You insult my officers. You are living on my land --

INARA
This land was ceded to House Madrassa by the Alliance when you were a buck private --

OBUN
No woman speaks to a General thus! A woman should kneel and show obeisance!

INARA
Get a culture.

GHEYDRA
Inara! General, she is upset over her friend's pain and speaks not her mind.
(back to Portuguese)
<Please accept our apologies and let us confer awhile on your request.>

OBUN
<I will leave my offerings for you to gaze upon. My next ones will not shine as brightly.>

He storms off. Sheydra pulls Inara down a corridor.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

They walk down the corridor, passing a class where girls are learning a sensuously ceremonial dance, all in sari's and holding fans.

GHEYDRA
Do you want him to come in and take this house at riflepoint?

INARA
Or what? We service him and his men at their demand? This isn't Earth-That-Was; we're not whores.

GHEYDRA
I don't believe general Obun cares whether or --

INARA
Beside the fact that most of these girls are still too young to be certified, the Alliance would never permit --

GHEYDRA
The Alliance is worlds from here. I would say you have at best advanced the General's timetable. A Companion works to defuse tension and treats a guest with deference.

INARA
A **guest**? General Obun is a thing that you shoot at! And then possibly cook. On a spit, with an open firepit --

GHEYDRA
Inara. You're a wonderful teacher and I'm very grateful that you've sheltered with us these last months. But in the time since you left that... pirate ship... you've chiefly done two things: complain about the apparently insufferable Captain Reynolds, and done everything in your power to behave just like him.

INARA
(completely flustered)
What! No! I'm not -- I don't be like him...

GHEYDRA
The companion I trained had not such a temper. We don't shoot people, Inara. And we try our best not to make them shoot us.

She leaves. Inara watches her, still almost bewildered.

INARA
I'm nothing like him...

EXT. BEAUMONDE: ATOLL PLAZA - EVENING

Serenity touches down on the crowded atoll amidst a number of other, equally disreputable ships.

The whole place is filled with every kind of immigrant culture, and every kind of shop imaginable. But all contained on an island not three miles square.

EXT/INT. SERENITY - EVENING

The ramp opens as Mal is talking with Book. The others approach, ready to hit the town.

BOOK
I'm happy to watch the boat. I've known the pleasures Beaumondé has to offer. I prefer to stay here and cheat at solitaire.

MAL
Sinner.

Simon comes abreast of Mal, River in hand.

MAL
(continuing)
Doc, you can try the barkers, but best you look the ships over direct. You'll want to avoid falling in with any criminal element.

Wash, Zoe, Jayne and Kaylee blow past, talking amongst themselves. Simon tries to catch Kaylee's eye, but she's not letting him.

SIMON
(to Mal)
Thank you.

MAL
We'll be at the Maidenhead, y'all can join us there for your cut once you've found passage.

He heads off. Simon starts in the other direction, but River pulls after Mal and the others.

SIMON
River. Try to stay by me.

EXT. THE MAIDENHEAD - EVENING

Disreputable and rustic, it doesn't attract the meeker of tourists, but neither is it unpleasant. The sign that hangs above the entrance has the same timeworn dignity that distinguishes Serenity herself.

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD - CONTINUING

The place is lit in pools, people keeping mostly to themselves. Maybe twenty customers total, giving themselves up to the sins of liquor, cards and the occasional flesh trade. Were a fight to break out, it would not be news.

We are at the bar, as Jayne is grudgingly giving up his guns to the gun-check girl. A sign behind her says: NO FIREARMS OR EXPLOSIVES ALLOWED. Pan over to find Wash cheerily bringing five mugs over to the table where Mal and Zoe wait.

WASH
Spiced ale for everyone, best in the house...

ZOE
Thank you, dear...

Jayne joins them.

JAYNE
Hate givin' up my sidearm. Feel nekkid without it.

WASH
I have that too, only with clothes.

ZOE
Fanty and Mingo ain't usually late --

MAL
Quit your worrying, Zoe --

JAYNE
Hey hey! The CV!

They all turn to see:

ANGLE: IN THE CORNER is the big CorVue screen, showing a news report. On the screen is a shot of the town they robbed, now half of it a smoking ruin.

Mal turns up a little drive-in type speaker box at their table to hear:

NEWSPERSON (V.O.)
... that it was a band of Reavers has been confirmed. The only survivors of the massacre apparently locked themselves in the Trade Station vault until help arrived.

ON THE SCREEN we see a crappy image of the guard from the heist.

GUARD
It just seemed like the smart thing to do.

JAYNE
Weren't even your notion, fruitbat --

MAL
Shh.

OFFSCREEN REPORTER
And the money?

GUARD
Wasn't room for it, we threw it out. Reavers musta took it.

JAYNE
Hey hey! Now I like him well.

ZOE
(turning down the sound)
For a purple-belly, he ain't half dumb.
(to Mal)
That was a good call, sir. Lotta people.

MAL
(brushes it off)
Lotta people get to spend the next year burying their whole town. Lucky souls.

Kaylee joins them, cheerily.

KAYLEE
Ooh, is this for me?

WASH
Drink hearty, it's all yours.

JAYNE
Didya hear how we're heroes?

MAL
Forget that talk --

KAYLEE
Wait! A toast! Gotta say a toast.

They raise their glasses.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
To our Captain.

They clink, and everyone moves to drink -- and Kaylee tosses her entire pint right into Mal's face, soaking him.

MAL
Spah-- what --

KAYLEE
(furious)
You told Simon you'd shoot him if he got with me?

MAL
You moonbrained cow, what are you --

KAYLEE
You kept him away from me! you know how much I pined on him and you went and ruined my whole life!

MAL
I'm supposed to do a deal now covered in spiced ale? You idiot child, I oughta slap you silly.

ZOE
Did you really tell the Doctor you'd shoot him?

MAL
I don't know! I may have indicated violence of some kind... to protect you!

KAYLEE
From what? Gettin' some yum-yum?

MAL
From gettin' your heart tore up!

KAYLEE
I'm a growed-up woman, can take care of my own damn heart.
(more)

KAYLEE (cont'd)
I think the Doc was fair sweet on me, but no -- you just couldn't stand the thought of anyone gettin' bumpy if you can't.

WASH
(re: Zoe)
Does that mean we have to stop?

KAYLEE
I'm so mad at you! I waited... goin' on a year now I ain't had nothin' twixt my nethers weren't run on batteries!

MAL
Oh god! I can't know that!

JAYNE
I could stand to hear a little more...

KAYLEE
You ain't my daddy, and if you --

MAL
You knew he was gonna leave. We never been but a way station to those two. Besides, what does he feel for you? If I truly wanted someone bad enough, wouldn't be nothing or no one could stop me from going to her.

KAYLEE
Tell that to Inara.

For a moment, Mal is too shocked to react.

MINGO
Domestic troubles?

MINGO is young, rough-edged -- somewhere between a gangster and a fur-trader.

FANTY
Domestic troubles?

FANTY moves out from behind Mingo to reveal that he is Mingo's **identical twin**. Apart from slight differences in dress, they are indistinguishable.

MINGO
'Cause we don't wanna interrupt.

FANTY
A man should keep his house in order.

MAL
(greets them each)
Mingo. Fanty.

MINGO
(pointing at his brother)
He's Mingo.

MAL
He's Fanty. You're Mingo.

MINGO
Ghahh! How is it you always know?

MAL
Fanty's prettier.

FANTY
That was also my assumption.

MAL
(pulling out a chair)
Feel to do some business?

MINGO
Bit crowded, isn't it? As you see, we come unencumbered by thugs.

MAL
Which means at least four of the guys already in here are yours. All's one. I'll just keep Jayne here with me.

ZOE
Sir, are you sure you don't --

MAL
Go. Go get yourselves a nice romantic meal.

WASH
Those are my two favorite words!
(to Zoe)
Honey... "Meal..."

MAL
(to Zoe)
It's business. We're fine.
(to Kaylee)
You go and await sudden, horrible retribution.

KAYLEE
(in Chinese)
<Eat my beautiful ass.>

The three of them leave and the four men sit down to the aforementioned business. Mal tosses a small bag of money to Mingo.

MINGO
I like that little mechanic.

FANTY
("nah")
She's your type.

MAL
Best wrench in the skyways. Mite bit colicky.

FANTY
Hormones.

MINGO
Are you cutting us out, Mal?

MAL
How is that?

FANTY
You've moved on?

MINGO
Don't need us?

FANTY
Mingo's feeling the weight. The weight of the take.

MINGO
It's not substantial.

MAL
Well it's your cut, as agreed. Minus hazard pay.

MINGO
No such animal.

MAL
This was kind of a dangerous job.

MINGO
They're all dangerous. That's why we hire other people to do them.

MAL
Your end is detail work. Recon. Either you didn't know there were Reavers in the area, or you did. Either way you let us down something fierce.

ANGLE: RIVER

Has entered, is looking about.

Jayne sees her, nudges Mal, who looks and turns back to business. We stay on her as she wanders around the perimeter of the bar, vaguely listening in on Mal's deal.

FANTY
What we're doing now, the both of us, is watching your mouth move while we think about how unhappy we are.

MINGO
We never negotiate after the fact, Mal. Danger is, after all, your business.

JAYNE
Reaver's ain't business, double dickless.

FANTY
Your dog is barking, Malcolm.

JAYNE
Should oughta watch me bite.

MAL
We're alright here, Jayne.
(to the brothers)
Look at it from our point of view.

MINGO
We never do that. Nobody who ever made a living on the rim ever did that. We settle as agreed, or you two become unidentifiable remains.

MAL
We were set on by Reavers.

FANTY
You know that doesn't concern us.

MAL
No, what should concern you is the fact that we're here and they ain't. You know who's less frightening than Reavers? **Everybody.**

Jayne, meanwhile, has taken to looking about. His attention is drawn by:

ANGLE: THE CV SCREEN

On which comes a commercial. It's animated, goofy, cartoon animals and anime-style Asian girls all transforming to insane fantasy figures as they sing about:

COMMERCIAL
FRUITY OATY BARS, POW! HEY! FRUITY BARS, MAKE A MAN OF A MOUSE, MAKE YOU BUST OUT YOUR BLOUSE, EAT THEM NOW, BANG! PING! ZOW! -- TRY FRUITY, OATY BARS.

As this inane jingle continues, we see:

ANGLE: JAYNE

Humming along, delighted.

ANGLE: RIVER

Staring, entranced.

And we push in on her, watching, the light from the CV on her face, pushing to EXTREME CLOSE UP, all noise but the jingle fading out, finally that as well, just the sound of the hum in River's ears.

And she whispers:

RIVER
Miranda.

She turns and looks back at the crowd.

What happens next happens very fast.

She strides silently to the first table -- two men drinking quietly -- and she slams her foot into one's face, then whips it back into the other's, knocking them both unconscious as

People are turning, just registering that this girl --

Kicks the table into the back of a card player even as she sweeps a bottle off it behind her -- the bottle hits a man behind her square in the face, a man she never even looked at --

Now we're moving; people are rising, fleeing or pushing forward --

MAL
River...

JAYNE
Dammit!

She's at the card table, taking out a group of four, high kicks and perfect precision -- one man stands and she kicks his chair around and into his shins, his neck slamming down on the back as she vaults over him --

Two men come at her from either side, one whipping out a knife -- she does a perfect split and grabs his wrist above her head, using his momentum to make him stab the guy coming at him --

Fanty looks at Mal, who fights to get back to the bar. Fanty looks around and she is on him, knocks him head first into Mingo's head, takes a moment to grab a plate from a table and hurl it into the back of someone's neck just as he's fleeing --

She's everywhere. On tables, chairs, under your legs, using the room itself to take out every single person there.

Jayne grabs her from behind --

JAYNE
(continuing)
Dammit, girl, it's me!

She grabs his crotch and squeezes -- his grip loosens and she spins, facing him, and flat-heels his nose with her palm, twirling into a gut kick that doubles him over, dispatching of two others while she finishes Jayne off with a small table swung at the back of his head --

Somebody pulls a gun and she snaps his elbow, causing him to scream out even before he shoots himself in the gut --

Mal dives behind the bar as River knocks the gun in the air, kicks someone else and then catches it, whips it around just as Mal comes up with his own gun, they are pointed right at each other --

SIMON
Eta Kooram Nah Smech!

And River drops to the ground, fast asleep.

There is a beat. Mal looks around the bar. He and Simon, who has run up to the entrance, are the only ones standing. (Most everyone else is alive, but hardly moving.) Mal is shaking only slightly.

MAL
I think maybe we ought to leave.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We see two sleek warships glide silently into frame, followed by a third, bigger ship. This is Jude's vessel, and it is everything Serenity is not: sleek, predatory, icy cool.

INT. JUDE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Jude is watching a few different screens, all depicting the River fight from the angle of a cheesy security cam, with "Maidenhead, Atoll Plaza, 19:27 -- Property of Beaumonde Lawforce" running below...

JUDE
(admiringly)
A little whirlwind...

A young ENSIGN approaches Jude.

ENSIGN
Sir, we have a match. The man carrying her out is captain of a transport ship, Serenity. Ship's long out of port and vanished like smoke.

He works the console, brings up a still of Mal (as Mal carries River out), then a police photograph.

JUDE
I wouldn't wonder.
(looking at the info)
Malcolm Reynolds. Bound by Law five times, never imprisoned... hardly the type to harbor infamous fugitives with no money --

ENSIGN
Maybe Tam did have some money squared away --

JUDE
Then he wouldn't be spending it here. Firefly-class transport ship, crew of seven... smuggling charges, strong-arm work... typical border-moon parasite, doesn't fit the pro -- go back. What is the name of his ship please?

The word "Serenity" appears on the screen.

JUDE
(continuing)
Serenity.
(adjusting his glasses)
Well of course.

He looks over at the ensign with a small, strange smile on his lips -- as his eyes are covered by text running down his glasses lenses.

ENSIGN
Sir?

JUDE
Serenity was the bloodiest battle of the entire war, soldier. I would expect you to know that. The independents held the valley for seven weeks, two of them **after** their high command had surrendered. 68% casualty rate.

ENSIGN
Of course, Sir, I just didn't --

JUDE
There.

Has glasses stop scrolling and Mal's military file opens, a picture of Mal in one lens.

JUDE
(continuing)
If the feds ever bothered to crossref justice files with war records, everyone would be saved a great deal of time. Our Mr Reynolds was a sergeant, 57th Overlanders. Volunteer. Fought unification with a notable vengeance -- I was mistaken in the man. He is exactly the sort to harbor fugitives, just to give the Alliance a tweak. No idea what horrors he's in for. Horrors.
(small laugh)
Bedtime stories...

The Ensign gives no sign of noticing that Jude occasionally free-associates thus.

ENSIGN
First mate Zoe Washburn, formerly Corporal Zoe Alleyne, also in the 57th.

JUDE
Give me the crew, registered passengers, contacts... this is a capricious dog, and nothing resembling subtle -- he's bound to have some very obvious...

CLOSE ON: JUDE'S EYE

As we RACK FOCUS from his eye to the lens of his glasses. On it is a slowly moving picture of INARA.

JUDE
(continuing)
...weakness...

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River is still asleep, Mal finishing chaining her arms behind her. She lies on her side, breathing evenly.

Mal stares at her a moment, then:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Mal exits to find the whole group waiting for him, sans Wash.

SIMON
May I see her?

MAL
She's still napping just now. And I believe you've got some storytelling to do.

Wash enters from the bridge.

WASH
We're out of atmo, plotted for Haven. No one following as of yet.

KAYLEE
We gonna park at Dresden's?

MAL
Til we know the landscape a little better, yeah. You can help with that, Doc, by telling us what the rutting hell is up with your sister. What happened in there?

WASH
Start with the part where Jayne gets knocked out by a ninety pound girl. 'Cause I don't think that's ever gettin' old.

JAYNE
Keep talking, little man; I long to damage you.

BOOK
Do we know if anyone was killed?

MAL
It's likely. I know she meant to kill me 'fore the Doc put her to sleep, which how exactly does that work again?

SIMON
Trigger.
(beat)
The people who helped me break River out --

BOOK
The Resistance.

SIMON
(nods)
They warned me that River and the other subjects were being embedded with mnemonic triggers. They taught me how to make her sleep, in case... something happened.

KAYLEE
Not sure I get it.

SIMON
A phrase that's encoded in her brain, that makes her fall asleep. If I speak the words, "Eta --

JAYNE
Well don't **say** it!

ZOE
It only works on **her**, Jayne.

JAYNE
Oh. Well, now I know that.

MAL
In case something happened.

SIMON
What?

MAL
What you said. I'd like you to elaborate on 'something'. What other triggers does this girl have?

SIMON
I don't know all of them...

MAL
Would one of them happen to be, "Kill everybody in the room"?

Simon waits even longer than usual to answer.

SIMON
Yes.

MAL
Eight months. Eight months you had her on my boat knowing full well she might go monkeyshit at the wrong word and you never said a thing --

SIMON
I brought her out here so they couldn't trigger her, I don't even know how they --

MAL
My ship. My **crew**! You had a gorramn timebomb living with us!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River's eyes open.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
What if she went off in the middle of dinner, or in bunk with Kaylee, did that give you a moment's pause --

SIMON
I thought she was out of their reach!

ZOE
Do we have any idea what did trigger her?

MAL
I don't know. I was in the deal with Mingo...

JAYNE
She was watching CV. That advert was on, for them fruity oaty bars. They got that song, it's powerful catchy so I recall...

BOOK
A message through the Cortex.

ZOE
A subliminial.

JAYNE
Words gettin' awfully long here...

MAL
We don't have time for you to play catch up, Jayne.
(to Zoe, quietly)
What's that mean?

ZOE
Something hidden in the picture, or the audio. Something you see but don't know you see.

BOOK
Which means the Alliance is still hoping to find River.

MAL
Wrong. It means they already have.

ZOE
No way her little dance of death went unreported. Or her connection to us.

ANGLE: RIVER

We see her superimposed next to Mal, mouthing his words:

MAL
(quietly)
Stormclouds. Sky's gettin' dark.

JAYNE
Well can I, in the grand tradition of bein' me, suggest we kick 'em the hell off this boat at long last?

There is actually a moment of quiet consideration.

KAYLEE
Isn't anybody gonna say something mean about Jayne?

JAYNE
Guess they're finally seeing the sense of things.

BOOK
I don't know how much my vote counts, but I'm not interested in abandoning this girl.

JAYNE
That's 'cause you didn't get your goolies near tore off by her! For all I know, I been rendered incompetent!

ZOE
That's impotent.

WASH
Either's good for me...

MAL
(to Simon, over them:)
You did say you wanted to get off the ship. And I can't think of a single reason to keep you on.

A beat, Simon really doesn't have a reply.

SIMON
May I see her.

Mal steps aside. Simon enters the locker.

JAYNE
She goes off again, we're gonna have to put a bullet to her.

MAL
It's crossed my mind.

WASH
Can I make a suggestion that doesn't involve violence, or is this the wrong crowd?

ZOE
Honey...

WASH
I think we should find out what's really going on out there. I think we should talk to Mr. Universe.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We see the vastness of the universe, then the camera swoops in -- too fast to be a ship or POV -- at a sparking ion cloud, then through the cloud at a barren, metallic satellite moon. Further in to reveal a sprawling -- and completely empty -- industrial complex.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

Still moving in, we discover an extremely unkempt young man. Also sleep-deprived, over-caffinated and kinda sweet. This is MR UNIVERSE.

He's surrounded by screens, computers, feeds -- machinery that looks both ultra-modern and long neglected. All the screens play different images -- it's a mediaverse.

The dominant color in his world is black, and though he stays in his little space, the room itself is vast, overlooking bigger machines long since fallen into disuse. The most striking elements are Mr Universe himself and the robotic, mannikin-like "Lovebot" that is perched immobile on his cot.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As he rolls towards camera in his chair his image becomes a vidscreen and we find him addressing Wash, Mal and Zoe.

We intercut between the two spaces:

MR UNIVERSE
Wash! Oh my stars and garters, look at you!

WASH
Been awhile. How are things at the center of the world?

MR UNIVERSE
No, no, it's insane in here. I'm so close to -- there's no words. I have... I'm listening in... I have to tell you about the media, what they're having the most fun -- what's the clock on me having sex with your wife?

WASH
We're down to never and counting.

MR UNIVERSE
Zoe, you know you can do better. But I have a commitment to my lovebot, it was a civil ceremony -- look at this!
(holds up a sheaf of papers)
My brain did this -- five pages on the life of Peter Abelard -- in my sleep! Completely asleep and composed the whole thing! It's jibberish! Meaningless! But I feel a breakthrough is near.
(more)

MR UNIVERSE (cont'd)
(points out text)
I typed "Sploonalard", which -- something is trying to get through. Oh my God! You're in horrible danger!

MAL
How's that?

MR UNIVERSE
Or you're just saying 'hi'. But I figured, you guys, probably horrible danger. Am I close?

MAL
That's kinda what we're trying to figure.

WASH
Can you throw us some playback?

MR UNIVERSE
All things are known to me, feed feed feeding, name your poison.

WASH
It's pretty local. The atoll plaza on Beaumonde, security feed from the Maidenhead, some ten hours back...

MR UNIVERSE
Security feeds aren't broadcast.

ZOE
We're wondering if it might have been. Headed somewhere central.

MR UNIVERSE
Take a little time, but if it's anywhere on the Cortex, I can get in, I can play.

MAL
(to Zoe)
The advert. The subominable... or, thing...

ZOE
(suppressing a smile)
How about the newsflow from that area. Around the same time...

MR UNIVERSE
What are you looking for there?

ZOE
Fruity oaty bars.

MR UNIVERSE
Oh! Hey! Make a man of a mouse! I'm always trying to get those delivered.

He slides his chair to a bank of screens, starts punching up information.

MR UNIVERSE
(continuing)
Beaumonde, eventime, broadline advert, food or food substitutes --
(to the gang)
Nobody's mentioned Lenore's hair! She had it cut special...
(to his lovebot)
These people, they're rubes, the haven't the finer graces...

MAL
(to Zoe)
Say something about hair.

ZOE
The hair looks very good. And fluffy. Did you go to a salon --

MR UNIVERSE
Got it.

He watches the annoying commercial on one screen and a stream of code on the other.

MR UNIVERSE
(continuing)
Oh yeah. There's definitely something underneath this. Bunged if I know what. This is... I think this is Alliance cryptage, highest security, this, whoah. Take me a week just to -- how do you know about this?

WASH
Long story.

MR UNIVERSE
(staring at the code)
I'm gonna stand by that earlier, 'horrible danger' theory. How can we help?

ZOE
Just keep an eye out. Anything comes up about us, give us a wave.

MR UNIVERSE
Yes ma'am. Whoah! Okay, that's Military, yeah, MilCom runs that pattern, very fine...

He turns back to look into the screen, at the gang, with excitement in his eyes:

MR UNIVERSE
(continuing)
Did you guys steal a weapon?

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River stares at us, impassive, as the camera pulls away from her to reveal Simon, who is cleaning blood off her face with a cloth. After a moment she says:

RIVER
They're all afraid of me.

SIMON
I'm sorry...

RIVER
They should be. What I will show them... Oh God...

She starts tearing up, breathing faster... Simon runs his hands through her hair.

SIMON
It's okay, it's okay...

RIVER
(somewhere else)
Show me off like a dog, old men covered in blood, it never touched them but they're drowning in it... so much loss... I don't know what I'm saying. I never know what I'm saying...

SIMON
You remembered something. When you were triggered.

FLASH CUT TO:

River points her finger at Simon's head, pretending to shoot -- and there is a loud **BANG!**

RESUME SCENE:

SIMON
I think maybe it brought something up.

RIVER
Miranda.

SIMON
Miranda.

RIVER
(laughs bitterly)
Ask her. She'll show you all.

SIMON
Show us what? Who is Miranda?
(hesitant, this sounds stupid:)
Am I... talking to Miranda now?

She shoots him a look.

RIVER
I'm not a multiple, dumbo.

SIMON
No. Right. But who, what is --

RIVER
I haven't been informed.
(urgently:)
Don't make me sleep again.

SIMON
I won't.

RIVER
Put a bullet to me. Bullet in the brain pan, squish.

SIMON
Don't say that. Not ever. We'll get through this.

She reaches out and touches his face, affectionately.

RIVER
Things are going to get much much worse.

SIMON
Well, the Captain hasn't tossed us in the airlock, so I'd say we're --

RIVER
For him too. Everyone gets tested.

SIMON
River. What will Miranda show us.

She thinks.

RIVER
Death.

SIMON
Whose death?

And she starts laughing. Quietly at first, then louder, then almost uncontrollably, screaming in his face:

RIVER
EVERYBODY'S!!!

SMASH CUT TO:

Black Silence.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

It's pitch black here, til Serenity's lights throw a hard relief on the rocky wall to one side of frame. She flies in after, slow and steady, revealing herself to be in a huge **mineshaft**.

She settles slowly, and we begin to intercut with the conversation that takes place right outside her moments after: Mal facing off with DRESDEN, a weathered and decent miner.

INT. CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

DRESDEN
Mal.

MAL
Dresden.

DRESDEN
What are you running from?

MAL
I'm honestly not sure.

DRESDEN
You understand that's a fairly expensive answer.

MAL
We're flush.

DRESDEN
Then make yourselves to home. just don't leave your ship, or talk to any of my -- Agh!

KAYLEE
(jumping on him)
Dresden!

She kisses his cheek a bunch, drops down.

DRESDEN
You're lookin' fine, Kaylee.

KAYLEE
And you look like the End of time. Where's my boyfriend?

ANGLE: A SIX YEAR OLD BOY peeks out from behind a rock.

Kaylee spots the boy as the others file down off the ramp, greeting Dresden familiarly.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
There you are!

She picks him up. He's shy but pleased.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
Not a single wave the whole time I'm gone! I forgive you. When are we getting married?

BOY
Micklemass.

KAYLEE
I can't wait that long! you gotta make an honest woman of me, so I can kiss your big ol' head!

During this we focus on:

ANGLE ON: A big-ass cannon mount sitting in the cave. The group passes it.

MAL
The hell?

DRESDEN
Can't interest you lot in a cannon mount, can I? Got it off some naughty bandits couldn't pay their way.

MAL
(the pondering buyer)
You know, I like it -- I don't **love** it.

DRESDEN
Few months everyone's gonna have one, and then who looks the fool?

EXT. MINING CAMP - SUNSET

The mining camp is a series of walkways connecting tin shacks and silos, right on the mountainside. Lights burn in a number of the shacks.

Everybody (minus Simon and River) is heading down to the main house, greeting old friends, talking amongst themselves. Mal and Dresden hang back, walk more slowly.

DRESDEN
The new girl.
(pointing to his head)
One that's teched?

MAL
Took out a room full of considerable folk soon as you could say to do it. It was a thing to see.

DRESDEN
Got a plan?

MAL
Lay low, see how big the ripples get.

DRESDEN
And the girl?

MAL
Don't know. I think she's a danger to us. I feel for her, though. She's more scared than anyone.

DRESDEN
Amazing things they can do to a person's brain nowadays.

MAL
And they think they got the right to do it. No territory is off limits, right?

DRESDEN
It's good to see you anyhow.

MAL
Kaylee wasn't wrong, though -- you don't look the blushing schoolgirl I remember.

DRESDEN
Been a rough winter.
(not anxious to say:)
Mine's drying up. Won't keep up more'n' another year. And I can't make a living harboring lowlifes such as yourself.

MAL
You'll start out, what -- north?

DRESDEN
(shaking his head)
Same all over this moon. Mines running dry, and it ain't shit for growing anything.

Pointing in the sky:

DRESDEN
(continuing)
Go closer to the center, too many Alliance, too crowded to find work. T'other way, nothing but black sky and the hospitality of the Reavers.
(a beat)
So we all got troubles. Same on every world spinnin'. What we also got is potato wine has a fearsome kick to it. Shall we drown our sorrows?

MAL
I might hold mine under for a while...

Dresden smiles, heads off. Mal looks at the night sky, the two directions Dresden pointed. The lack of options.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

Inara is in the corridor, hurrying to the meeting place where she was with Obun. With her is a young COMPANION.

COMPANION
They just landed. They signalled all-access; it must be an envoy of some sort.

INARA
<Well praise Buddha for them.> I knew the Alliance wouldn't let a thug like Obun run rampant over a licensed house, even out here. Ask Gheydra to join me, will you?

COMPANION
<Of course, Teacher.>

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - CONTINUING

Inara comes out and stands waiting, her back to us, in front of the very vista we first saw her appear before.

We hear footsteps. Many. On the march.

Uniformed Alliance soldiers, faces half hidden by tinted riot faceplates, come up into view in two columns, on either side of Inara.

They pass her, never looking at her, continuing beyond as Jude comes more slowly up the staircase, stands before Inara.

She looks at him, at the constant line of marching men, back at him.

Her face hardens. The cavalry has not arrived.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The Teacher from the very beginning is standing in front of a screen depicting a single, dark planet. She looks inquisitively at:

TEACHER
River?

Eight-year-old River is working away, not paying attention.

TEACHER
(continuing)
River, you look tired. I think everybody's a little tired by now; why don't we all lie down.

River's head shoots up -- she looks at her teacher with horror.

All the other children wordlessly get up from their seats and lie on the floor next to them.

TEACHER
(continuing)
A little peace and quiet will make everything better.

She starts to lie down herself, right on the floor.

RIVER
No...

TEACHER
River. Do as you're told. It's going to be fine. Lie down.

RIVER
NO!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River starts awake. Looks around, quietly. Stares toward the door.

RIVER
She's a puzzlement, that girl. Don't make sense.
(more)

RIVER (cont'd)
'Cept sometimes she does. If I gave her up, would that be an end to my woes?

Sitting before her is Mal, thinking exactly that.

RIVER
(continuing)
Is there any way out of this?

MAL
That is a hell of a parlour trick, darlin'. Should hire you out at parties.

RIVER
But we don't go to parties.

MAL
Well I think we're missing out.

RIVER
Would I be able to kill this girl?

MAL
Okay, that's plenty of **my** brain, let's maybe spend some time inside your own. Do you know at all why they're after you with such a will?

RIVER
Miranda.

MAL
Your brother mentioned that. We none of us know what it means.

RIVER
Something else. Peace. Pax. I don't know. I'm afraid of it.

MAL
Well, try to see it clearly if you can. My terrain's all fogged up here. I got no compass. Can you help?

RIVER
The more I remember, the harder they'll come.

MAL
I expect that's the case. But try.

He gets up to leave.

RIVER
Captain...

He turns back.

RIVER
(continuing)
Don't lie down.

MAL
Um, okay. I'll...

He goes. She watches him, then looks down at her shackles.

RIVER
(whisper)
Mustn't ever lie down...

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Mal shuts the door behind him, sees Book approaching.

MAL
Nobody goes in there but me.

BOOK
I thought I might offer her some comfort.

MAL
(re: bible)
From that?

BOOK
In point of fact, yes. There's some very compelling passages --

MAL
I remember them. Read her something from Job, that oughta get a laugh.

BOOK
Job never lost faith.

MAL
Job got squirted on from the heavens and never had the brains to wear a hat; he ain't exactly a role model to me.
(more)

MAL (cont'd)
(starts to leave, stops)
I tell you, it wonders me, you having sailed with us all this time and you still turn to that bible.

BOOK
More and more, actually.

MAL
Do you really think what that girl needs now is a Shepherd?

BOOK
At some point or other I think everyone needs a Shepherd.

MAL
No, just mainly sheep.
(as he goes)
You wanna comfort River, stand there and think happy thoughts. Like as not, she'll hear 'em.

He exits into:

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

And kicks his door open, climbs down into:

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

He pulls down his suspenders and pulls off his shirt. Wipes his brow with it, tosses it on the floor.

The place ain't too tidy. It resembles a submarine cabin, with charts and clutter, ancient maps decorating the walls.

Mal grabs a bottle of something unscrupulous, downs a swig.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is in the pilot's seat, and Zoe is straddling him. Playing with his hair -- as much affection as steamyosity.

ZOE
That potato wine is the devil's own brew.

WASH
I can't feel my elbows. Is that a bad sign?

ZOE
Why are we here?

WASH
Do I usually feel my elbows? What is our sense of elbow?

ZOE
Why are we on the bridge? The ship isn't flying anywhere. I'm pretty certain...

WASH
I thought Mr Universe might give us a wave.

ZOE
And we're gonna wait up here til he does?

WASH
Well things are... they're bad. Not our usual wacky sort of bad. Feels like something's catching up to us.

ZOE
Then we should be in our bunk, using what time we got.

She kisses him.

WASH
You're so wise. Wise and dirty, it's a powerful --

There is light and static from one of the screens, a message coming in.

WASH
(continuing)
Aha! Mr univ...

They look, both a tad perplexed.

WASH
(continuing)
Oh.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Mal moves to one wall, pulls out the toilet, begins unbuttoning his pants --

WASH (O.S.)
Mal, got a wave. I'm a bounce it down to you.

He buttons up, turns to the screen as the white noise becomes:

MAL
Inara.

REVERSE ON: Inara on Mal's screen. We see her from about chest level up. She, presumably, sees the same.

INARA
Mal. I uh, is this a bad time?

MAL
Good as any.

INARA
Please tell me you're wearing pants.

MAL
(slight grin)
Naked as the day I come cryin'. How's your world?

INARA
Cold. It's winter here.

MAL
Still at the Training House?

INARA
Right where you left me.

MAL
I remember it as nice enough. Picturesque.

INARA
It is that. What about you?

MAL
Still flying.

INARA
Everyone in good health?

MAL
Pink and rosy. So what occasions the wave? Not that to see you ain't... well you look very fine...

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Zoe and Wash are secretly watching both Mal and Inara on two different screens, smiling at their formal shyness.

Book enters, wondering what's up...

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

INARA
Oh. I... I don't even know if you're anywhere nearby, but... we're having some problems here. There's a general Obun, he's pressuring the girls to.... well I think you'd get the drift straight off if you saw.

MAL
Fellow needs a talking to.

INARA
It could be. But if you're booked up, I don't wanna --

MAL
I'll be truthsome: we got a little more work than we can handle, for once. And we ain't exactly close by.

INARA
Of course, I understand --

MAL
I didn't say no. But, ah, let me sound out the crew, see how they stand. This pot like to boil over soon?

INARA
Soon. Not right away.

MAL
Well, it would be, I mean I would like to... Kaylee's been missing you something fierce, I'll tell you --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

There is a general groan among the audience, which now includes Kaylee as well...

KAYLEE
Oh they're so pathetic!

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

INARA
I miss her too. I even miss my shuttle, occasionally.

MAL
Never did rent it again.

INARA
Oh.

Who's for an uncomfortable beat?

MAL
Well, it's kind of late where I'm at. I'll send a wave as soon as I can.

INARA
Thank you.

MAL
So, bye...

INARA
Yes. Okay.

MAL
Right.

She disappears. Mal thinks a moment.

INT. BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal comes up in, buttoning his shirt.

WASH
Inara. Nice to see her again.

ZOE
So, trap?

MAL
Trap.

ZOE
We goin' in?

MAL
It ain't but a few hours out. And if it's a trap, then Inara's already caught in it.

KAYLEE
How can you be sure she don't just wanna see you? Sometimes people have feelings -- I'm referring here to **people**...

MAL
Y'all were watching, I take it.

Guilty glances.

KAYLEE
Yes.

MAL
You hear us fight?

KAYLEE
No.

MAL
Trap.

He exits.

EXT. SPACE - ABOVE INARA'S PLANET - DAY

We hear the ROAR of a giant freighter passing through atmosphere high above the planet. It passes camera and we see the giant sun-like engines spewing flame. We also see Serenity right behind it, practically being furnace-blasted as it follows.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal, Zoe and Wash are in the bridge, trying not to look directly at the light. Also sweating.

ZOE
We got about half a minute before our wiring fuses and we're an art object.

MAL
Just a few more seconds...

ZOE
You used those up saying that.

MAL
Wash...

WASH
Little sweaty, thanks for asking --

MAL
Blackout.

Wash hits a couple switches and and Serenity goes dark.

EXT. SPACE - ABOVE INARA'S PLANET - CONTINUING

Serenity drops like a stone. An even rockier ride than the one in the beginning.

ZOE
We should be under orbital scan in two thousand feet --

MAL
Call it.

ZOE
And three, two...

Wash hits the jet thrusters -- which are on the steering wheel -- and pulls up slowly.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

The thrusters slow the decent, the ship leveling off and swooping gracefully over the snowy mountains.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

MAL
Shiny.

WASH
We're about seventy miles from the Training house.

MAL
Find us a home. I'll take the shuttle in closer. Zoe, ship is yours.

He starts out, turns back to Zoe.

MAL
(continuing)
Remember: if anything happens to me, or you don't hear from me within the hour... you take this ship and you come and rescue me.

ZOE
What? And risk my ship?

MAL
(exiting)
I mean it. It's cold out there. I don't wanna get left.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

She is nestled in a snowy gorge, overhanging rocks all but burying her from view. The shuttle on the right -- Inara's old shuttle, in fact -- lifts off from the side of the ship and glides off into the distance.

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

We see a couple of guards looking out over the mountains. Behind them a line of young trainees files by in robes and red shawls pulled over their heads. Though the girls are out of focus, the discerning eye might notice that one of them is a good deal larger than the others. The guards, fortunately, discern nothing.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal makes his way along a hall. He looks into a chamber and a guard sees him -- he gut-punches the guy, rips his helmet off and swings it around, cracking him inn the face with it and sending him sleepy-bye.

Catches the body and drags it out of sight.

INT. INARA'S ROOM - LATER

She is kneeling in front of a statue of Buddha, lighting a few incense sticks.

The room is sparsely lush -- not as opulent as her shuttle where she entertained men, but still beautifully furnished and draped. A lace curtain hangs in front of the light, casting its pattern in shadow over everything. Including the rather large woman in red who kneels beside Inara.

MAL
Dear Buddha, please send me a pony, and a plastic rocket, and --

INARA
Mal! What are you doing here?

MAL
You invited me.

INARA
I never thought for a second you'd be stupid enough to come!

MAL
Well that makes you kind of a tease, doesn't it?

INARA
You knew my invitation wasn't on the level --

MAL
Which led me to the conclusion that you must be in some trouble.

INARA
You have to go.

MAL
And you gotta come with me. Unless I'm wrong and you really did just ask me here to make sport of me --

INARA
Be going away!

MAL
I just wanna know if you're --

INARA
I'm fine!

MAL
And the Alliance platoon is just here for a little full alert R&R.

JUDE
(entering)
What I'm dealing with is amazement on two fronts: that you would be arrogant enough to actually come here, and that you made it past trained soldiers in that outfit.

MAL
(standing)
I can be very graceful when I need to.

JUDE
I've no doubt. And I apologize -- I should, I do, for calling you arrogant. I just never expected to get to you this quickly. It's thrilling.

MAL
I'm all aquiver.

Mal sheds his shawl and robe. Inara kneels at the alter, picks out another incense stick.

MAL
(continuing)
What are you doing?

INARA
I'm praying for you, Mal.

JUDE
That's very thoughtful. But I mean it when I say you're not in any danger. You don't -- I mean, you don't have to be.

MAL
Did you hurt her?

JUDE
Of course not. I'm interested in the other girl. I'd consider it a kindness if we skip the part where you tell me you don't know what I'm talking about.

MAL
Speak your piece.

JUDE
I think you're beginning to understand how dangerous River Tam is.

MAL
She is a mite unpredictable. Mood swings, of a sort.

JUDE
It's worse than you know.

MAL
It usually is.

JUDE
That girl will rain destruction down on you and your ship. She's an albatross, Captain.

MAL
Way I remember it, albatross was a ship's good luck... til some idiot killed it.
(to Inara)
Yes, I've read a poem. Try not to faint.

Jude moves further into the room, depositing his briefcase on a chair. Whenever he moves, Mal counters.

JUDE
I've seen your war record. I know how you must feel about the Alliance.

MAL
You really don't.

JUDE
You know you can't beat us.

MAL
I got no need to beat you. I just wanna go my way.

JUDE
And you can do that, once you let us take the girl back home. Give me the opportunity to help you.

MAL
All I gotta do is let you take one more thing away from me. I've had a lot of things taken in my time. And it may just be that this is one too many.

JUDE
This psychotic, potentially murderous girl who can't have the slightest awareness of your protection. This is where you "draw the line".

MAL
Well I'm a whimsical soul.

JUDE
There are a number of lives that hang in the balance here. Lives under your care. Are they as whimsical as yourself?

MAL
I got no notion that I'm being heroical at all. Any more than I think you're really just a harmless bureaucrat come to help me out. You move like a killer.

JUDE
(almost sheepish)
I am that.
(smiles)
I have a warship in deep orbit, Captain. We locked on to Serenity's pulse beacon the moment you hit atmo. I can speak a word and send a missile to that exact location inside of three minutes.

Mal pulls a small device, clipped wires sticking out all around it, and tosses it to Jude.

MAL
You do that, best make your peace with your dear and fluffy lord.

JUDE
Pulse beacon.

MAL
Advice from an old tracker: you wanna find someone, use your eyes.

JUDE
How long do you think you can really run from us?

MAL
Oh, a jack-rabbit, me. 'Sides, I never credited the Alliance with an over-abundance of brains, and you haven't really done anything to alter my theories. So how's about I give you the opportunity to kiss my muscular buttock and we'll get this underway?

JUDE
Captain Reynolds, I should tell you so that you don't waste your time: You can't make me angry.

INARA
Oh please. Spend an hour with him.

Mal smiles -- then glares at Inara, mouthing "Hey!"

JUDE
This ends exactly one way. River and Simon Tam -- or their bodies -- returned to us. Whatever else happens is incidental. In the greater scheme.

MAL
Why is it that the greater scheme always makes everything not that great?

JUDE
The Alliance has made our worlds safer, more civilized... that's fact. That may not mean anything to you, but it does to me. I believe in a better world.

MAL
I expect you do. I met a number of folk such as yourself when they was bombing my country to dust.

JUDE
I want to resolve this like civilized men. I'm not threatening you. I'm unarmed.

MAL
Good!

He draws and shoots Jude in the chest. Jude goes down in a heartbeat as Mal grabs Inara, moves for the doorway.

Jude is up and on him in a second, choke-hold from behind.

JUDE
I am of course wearing full body armor. I'm not a complete idiot.

He tosses Mal hard against a wall, spinning in the same motion and blocking a blow from Inara -- she is clearly trained in martial arts, but he flat-heels her to the ground within seconds.

Mal is going for his gun again, turning, and Jude kicks him in the face, sends him back, gun flying. Mal gets to his feet and the two of them square off. Mal breathing hard, blood dripping from his nose. Jude perfectly poised, waiting.

MAL
No back up? We're making an awful ruckus...

JUDE
They'll come when they're needed.

MAL
I'd start whistling.

JUDE
Captain, what do you think is going to happen here?

They come at each other and we see that Jude is in fact the much better trained -- he is fluid, his blows sparse and deadly. Mal is more bluster and determination, though he's veteran enough to go for the right blows.

Jude gets Mal from behind, bunches his finger to punch into the nerve cluster like he did with Mathias, but Mal launches them both back onto a stool, smashing it as they hit ground -- with Jude on the bottom.

But Mal's advantage lasts all of a second. Jude is on him again, and his precision is wearing Mal down. He finally spins in a kick to the head that sends Mal to the ground not far from Inara, breathing hard. He tries to rise again, painfully, but Inara places her hand on his arm.

Jude goes to his suitcase, pulls out his sword.

JUDE
(continuing)
That was bracing, thank you, but now we have to speed things up.

MAL
(in pain)
Is that Alliance issue?
(to Inara)
Probly a budget thing...

JUDE
(laughs quietly)
That's good. No. This is mine.
I'm a classicist.

The sword lengthens in his grip. His face has taken on that remote kind of fascination as he looks at it.

INARA
(dead calm)
Not a lunatic.

JUDE
Nothing here is what it seems.

INARA
I know.

JUDE
I'm not the bad man. He's not the plucky hero. This isn't the grand arena.

INARA
And that's not incense.

Jude turns to look -- and the incense stick burns away -- rather like a fuse -- and FLASHES in an explosion of light and sound.

It's just a flash-bomb, but Jude is knocked on his ass as everything goes smoky white and the sound dies to a tiny buzz.

Jude tries to get his bearings -- and four armored soldiers are in his face, asking him for orders --

He looks over and Mal and Inara are gone. He motions for the men to follow them.

JUDE
Go! Go! I'm fine. Just a flash bomb.
(indicating where Mal and Inara were)
They don't leave!

He gets to his feet, tries to shake it off as the men move out.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - CONTINUING

Inara leads Mal (who is reholstering his gun) down some steps and along a clearly out of the way corridor. All the sound is still tinny and weird.

MAL
...I had him...

INARA
What?

MAL
I think that I was winning!

She rolls her eyes, keeps moving. A soldier comes abreast of them -- Mal pulls Inara out of the way and exchanges fire, downing the man. They enter:

INT. A TRAINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Where they move past a shocked groups of girls clearly not paying attention to their Dulcimer lessons. Two more soldiers appear behind a screen --

MAL
Everybody **down**!

The girls fall screeching to the floor as he shoots both soldiers through the screen and drags Inara after him out of the class.

EXT. SIDE OF MOUNTAIN - DAY

Mal and Inara move quickly down through the snow. They look to see:

ANGLE: MAL'S SHUTTLE has four Alliance guards waiting by it.

Mal ducks back out of sight, pulls a fancy-looking grenade out of his pocket. Pops the top and hurls it over at the foursome.

CLOSE ON: THE GRENADE

As a series of bars of light go out one by one, counting down --

ALLIANCE SOLDIER
Grenade!

Everybody dives for cover. The moment they do, Mal and Inara race into the shuttle, Mal sweeping up the grenade just as the last light goes out and nothing happens.

One soldier turns to look and mal shoots him back down as the door shuts on him and Inara.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Mal tosses her the "grenade" --

MAL
They love the colorful lights...

-- and starts punching in the ignition sequence. Inara pushes into the pilot's seat.

INARA
Let me fly.

MAL
You sure you remember how it --

He nearly falls over as:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - CONTINUING

The shuttle shoots straight up, spinning and heading out.

INARA
Where are we going?

MAL
Serenity's east of us, nestled in the low ranges.

INARA
Mal, don't take this the wrong way, but in your next life I hope you come back as a polyp.

MAL
Is that good?

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - CONTINUING

Jude steps out into the light, still shaking off the effects of the bomb, as two Alliance fighter ships roar through frame, taking off after the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

The snowy terrain bullets by as Mal and Inara continue talking:

INARA
Do you have any idea what the girls at the training house might be facing because of you?

MAL
Because of **me**? Who all did the asking over? 'Cause I sure as hell didn't invite you anywhere.

INARA
You know I had no choice.

MAL
Whereas I shoulda let you twist and go my way whistlin'. That ain't my theme, lady.

INARA
That's exactly your theme!

MAL
You know, in your next life I hope you come back as a nasty, overbearing shrew. That way you won't have to learn any new skills!

INARA
(looking at her screens)
Whatever we're coming back as, it may be sooner than we'd hoped.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE - CONTINUING

The shuttle whips by, followed moments later by the much sleeker fighter ships.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

MAL
They probably won't shoot us down til we reach Serenity. Can you lose them?

INARA
Those are warships, Mal. Built in this century.

MAL
Don't tell me what I know.

INARA
What in Buddha's name did River do?

She banks, hard, Mal again nearly losing balance.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE - CONTINUING

The shuttle slips between two peaks -- the two warships passing by and circling back, losing their momentum a tad.

INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal's voice comes on:

MAL (O.S.)
Coming in hard and we are not alone.

ZOE
How much of a lead you got?

MAL (O.S.)
Inara bought us a couple of seconds.

ZOE
You want us to light up?

MAL (O.S.)
Should make the view more colorful..

ZOE
That it will.
(to Wash)
We need to be airborne --

WASH
(working controls)
Way ahead of you...

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

She's in that low chasm, and she slowly rises...

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN RANGE - CONTINUING

The shuttle moves in and out of sight, racing to Serenity.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Mal stands in the doorway by Inara, who is all concentration.

MAL
Come in hard and then drop.

INARA
Just hang on to something...

EXT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

As it comes atop Serenity and drops into place with killer precision.

The two warbirds comes racing into view -- and Serenity's back lights up -- exploding in fire and causing the snow to turn into a snow storm and an avalanche, destroying the little ships as the firefly rockets off into the distance.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Inara stares straight ahead, relaxing her grip on the controls. Mal is gone.

INARA
I told you to hang on to something.

MAL (O.S.)
(in great pain)
I'm fine...

EXT. SPACE - LATER

As Serenity burns away from the planet.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Mal's back, rubbing his spine.

MAL
Are we being followed from orbit?

WASH (O.S.)
No. The big ship is heading into atmo.

INARA
Probably won't make a move without their fearless leader.

MAL
Did he touch you?

INARA
What?

MAL
The government man.

INARA
Jude.

MAL
Did he touch you at all? Could he have planted anything on you, any kind of beacon?

INARA
You wanna search me?

The question is so loaded that Mal cannot reply for a moment -- and in that moment, the door opens. They head out to see:

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Zoe is right there, Book and Kaylee approaching from the bottom of the cargo bay. Kaylee at top speed, Book not so much. Jayne also wanders down from above.

ZOE
See you've still got the touch with the shuttle.
(they hug)
Sorry we had to drag you back here.

MAL
(dryly)
We're all sorry about that...

KAYLEE
Inara!

She throws herself into Inara's arms, kissing her a bunch of times.

INARA
Kaylee, Mei-mei. I missed you.

KAYLEE
It's been horrible since you left. Mal's like a monster.

ZOE
Got an idea what we're up against, Sir?

MAL
Somewhat. Things got ugly fast, had to go into rescue mode.

INARA
I'm sorry. Are you implying that **you** rescued **me**?

MAL
Who snuck in and pulled you out of --

INARA
You'd still be getting your kidneys punched if I hadn't had the insane notion of thinking ahead --

MAL
There was rescuing. Of different kinds, let's not get all manic over details --

ZOE
(to Jayne)
Yep. They're back.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Inara greets Simon, who is standing guard at his sister's 'cell'. They clasp hands, formally but with great warmth. They speak only in Chinese.

INARA
<Simon. I'm so sorry this has come upon you.>

SIMON
<Sorrier I am that you've been dragged into it.>

INARA
<How is River?>

He looks back at the cell.

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - LATER

Inara kneels over the sleeping River, brushing hair from her face, as a tense Mal watches from the doorway.

INARA (O.S.)
His name is Jude. And I am honestly very afraid of him.

INT. CARGO BAY - NIGHT

The whole group is present.

INARA (O.S.)
He's a believer. He really thinks River represents some threat to the Alliance.

BOOK
Seems far-fetched.

JAYNE
Only people she's a threat to are us on this boat.

SIMON
You have no idea what **kind** of threat she's supposed to...?

INARA
I was hoping you did.

MAL
"Miranda". We don't know who or what, but it's on her mind.

SIMON
I've searched for references on the Cortex -- there's thousands. Nothing promising.

WASH
The Cortex -- won't they have "Miranda" flagged with a search alert?

INARA
I doubt it. Jude prides himself on not needing to know what this is all about. He's only concerned with the job.

As she speaks, we see (though the audio is unchanged) a silent tableau of:

INT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

Fanty and Mingo, tied to chairs, as Jude enters the room, staring at them dispassionately.

INARA (O.S.)
And he's very good at it. We can hide -- for a while -- but sooner or later he'll find us.

BACK TO SCENE:

ZOE
(to Mal)
Did he offer you a deal?

MAL
Just to give River up and go my way.

JAYNE
That sounds on the side of fair. So how come we're running.

MAL
The offer bothered me.

JAYNE
I ain't crazy about the lack a' reward, but livin' through the day has a bona fide sweetness to it. Hell, ain't that our creed?

He stands, really taking the floor.

JAYNE
(continuing)
No offense, Doc; I think it's noble as a grape the way you look to her, but she ain't my sister
(to Mal)
and she ain't your crew. Oh, and neither is she exactly helpless. So where's it writ we gotta lay down our lives for her, which is what you've steered us toward.

MAL
I didn't start this.

INARA
There's another issue. I hate to be saying this, but what if Jude is right? What if whatever's stuck inside River's head really **is** a danger to the Alliance?

ZOE
(soo dry)
That'd be a horrible shame.

BOOK
Not to some, maybe. But destabilizing the Universal Governing body could affect millions.

INARA
The Alliance has helped bring a lot of struggling planets to a civilized state. I know you two don't wanna hear that --

SIMON
So we should let them torture River some more.

INARA
You know that isn't what I'm saying.

MAL
No more torture, Doc. They mean to kill her. Yourself as well. And probably all of us --
(to Inara)
-- is that what you meant by civilized?

INARA
Try very hard not to be an idiot, Mal.

MAL
We're not dealing with a Universal Governing body here. We're dealing with an assassin. You think I coulda reasoned with him?

INARA
You could've not **shot** him...

JAYNE
Or you coulda not risked us all by taking them in in the first place. I know I'm not the only one thinking it so I'm damn tired of being the only one saying it.

Again, a tableau:

INT. MAL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mal, sitting alone, unsettled in his thoughts.

JAYNE (O.S.)
This ain't about any of us except you, Mal. You blow this way and that, we all gotta come along and say it's 'cause it had to be.

BACK TO SCENE:

JAYNE
But it doesn't have to be. It's just you, and your... you-ness.

ZOE
That's enough mouth for the day, Jayne.

JAYNE
I didn't hear you shouting me down.
(to Mal)
Even your lap-dog doesn't want you to --

WASH
Back right the hell off, fetus brain, or --

INARA
(over him)
This isn't getting us anywhere --

MAL
<Everybody shut up right now!>

They do.

Tableau:

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River lies with her head to the ground, wide awake. Listening?

MAL (O.S.)
We got troubles, that's all we need to know.

BACK TO SCENE:

MAL
We'll hole up at Dresden's just long enough to work a plan of action. We're gonna need rest so get some. Everybody.

They disperse. Mal looks around at his ship, wondering what the hell he's doing.

EXT. MINING CAMP - DAY

DRESDEN
Can't do it, Mal.

Widen to see he's standing in front of the mine shaft hole that sticks out of the mountain, one of the main housing units next to him. He speaks into a hand-held com, a few of his people coming and going from the mine entrance behind him.

Serenity hovers above, some thirty yards back.

DRESDEN
(continuing)
There's been too many whispers driftin' along the line. You lot are gettin' famous. Can't have that here.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal is on the bridge with Wash, Zoe, Inara and Kaylee. They look down right at Dresden in front of them.

WASH
(into com)
At least let me put down long enough to talk face to face.

DRESDEN
You seen my face, Mal. It ain't gettin' any prettier and it ain't sayin' yes. I got my own folk to think on.

A beat from Mal, disappointed.

MAL
'Course you do.

DRESDEN
Sanchez boys'll probably set you up proper. They like a little danger. They're stupid that way.

MAL
Yeah. I might give them a wave.

DRESDEN
I hate this like hell, Mal.

MAL
I know.

DRESDEN
You get through it, you come back. Door'll be wide open.

MAL
We're bringing our own liquor next time. That potato brew of yours smells like you drank it and sweated it out --

WASH
(looking at a screen)
Rutting hell --

The rocket arcs around the mountain, trailing smoke.

MAL
Pull us back --

WASH
It's not locked on us --

And the rocket passes by them, right over Dresden and into the mine.

DRESDEN
Everybody get --

And the explosion shakes the earth, sends a monster plume of fire and smoke out the entrance, knocking Dresden and several others back on their asses.

The warbird comes from the back of the mountain - small, sleek, silent but for its guns, which spit out at Serenity. She backs up -- literally -- as fast as she can, the gunfire causing no significant damage.

MAL
Come about and burn!

ZOE
Another hundred feet away and he can arm missiles --

MAL
We gotta draw him off the camp!

KAYLEE
He's not following...

ANGLE: The Warship turns to the camp and starts STRAFING it, mowing down everyone in sight.

Dresden pulls a miner to his feet -- and they are both **gutted** by gunfire.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
No, no, no...

The warbird fires poppers -- smaller missiles -- at the camp, and one by one the shacks explode.

ANGLE: THE LITTLE BOY that Kaylee picked up when she arrived. He is swept up by his mother as they race into a shack -- which explodes seconds later.

Kaylee SCREAMS.

MAL
Ram him!

Wash hits full power, the ship jolts forward, burns toward the warship, it turns, guns blazing -- and Wash banks like a racer, SLAMS the side of the ship into the warbird.

Everybody goes flying.

The warbird's wing is crumpled and sparking, but it's still capable, still firing in a stuttering arc.

MAL
(continuing)
Again.

INT. DINING ROOM/STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

Jayne comes in, gun drawn, and pulls open the storage locker door.

JAYNE
Hell with this. Let's just give em' what they want --

The door swings open. The cell is empty.

JAYNE
(continuing)
Oh bad.

He turns and she knocks his gun aside -- he fires once as she jabs his throat and throws him over the kitchen table.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

More gunshots are heard.

MAL
Zoe --

She takes off to check it out.

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

As Serenity rears back and rushes the warbird again -- missing. It continues to destroy every vestige of the camp.

MAL
Get above it.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Zoe enters, gun drawn. Jayne is on the floor, gasping for breath.

JAYNE
She's loose...

INT. INFIRMARY - CONTINUING

Simon is trying to keep the place from falling apart. He turns to see River.

SIMON
River.

RIVER
I'm causing this.

SIMON
No... you have to --

She jabs his throat viciously, kicking him in the side of the head and sending him unconscious to the floor. Looks down at him just exactly like a cold killer, then takes off.

INT. AFT HALL - CONTINUING

Zoe moves about the space quickly from wall to wall, looking out for River. Ready to shoot.

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

Serenity rises above the Warbird. It's unaffected by the burn of Serenity's engines, and its guns tilt up to fire into her belly.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

MAL
Blackout.

Wash flip the switches.

SO SMART

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

Serenity goes dead and simply plummets down on top of the warbird, hitting the ground and crushing the other ship.

INT. SERENITY - VARIOUS ANGLES

As EVERYBODY is knocked off their feet by the explosion.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal rights himself, hits the com.

MAL
(on the com)
Them as can, check for survivors.

WASH
Why didn't he just take us out?

MAL
(thinking)
They didn't know we were gonna be here. They knew about this place.

He starts punching up screens -- pulls down a large collapsible one above the copilots seat.

MAL
(continuing)
Get the Sanchez brothers on wave. Get Li Shen -- everyone who's ever sheltered us.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

The ramp comes down and Kaylee and Book come racing out.

INT. INFIRMARY - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe comes in as Inara kneels over an unconscious Simon.

INARA
This wasn't the crash.

ZOE
(softly)
Dammit.

Jayne enters, still groggy.

ZOE
(continuing)
Go help outside.

JAYNE
But she --

ZOE
You wanna get your ass kicked again? Just do it!

He moves out quickly. She moves out more slowly, Inara tending to Simon.

INT. BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Wash are silent, looking at all their screens.

MAL
Check the widewave.

WASH
Yeah.

He heads down the ladder in the front of the bridge. Mal continues to stare at the screens.

REVERSE to see: every one of them is filled with an image of flames and destruction, or simple static.

And after a moment, every one of them becomes an image of Jude.

JUDE
I'm sorry. But I cannot let you hide and I cannot let you run. Things become... extreme. And we wish for another way.

MAL
Don't talk at me like a righteous man. You are a killer of children.

JUDE
When God wanted Pharaoh to release his people from bondage -- you know the story? He didn't **ask**.
(more)

JUDE (cont'd)
He sent his plagues down upon Egypt. That's me, Captain. The path to peace is paved with corpses. It's always been so.

MAL
So me and mine got to lie down and die so you can live in your better world?

JUDE
I'm not going to live there. I -- this is so -- there's no place for me there, any more than there is for you. Malcolm, I'm a monster. What I do is evil, I have no illusions about it. But it must be done. I live to create a world that could not possibly contain someone like me. Paradox.

MAL
You will never see River Tam. I'm telling you this.

JUDE
No. No, but I know you'll keep her close and the next time you'll all be blown out of the sky. It's not... some things become inevitable.

MAL
Why are you all so afraid of one person's brain?

JUDE
I don't know. I don't care. That's not my function.

MAL
That's right, I forgot: You're a plague.

JUDE
One last time: If you come in peaceably, allowances can be made. I really do believe --

MAL
I don't. Believe. In any damn thing.

JUDE
Then why do you keep fighting?

His image winks out before Mal can think of an answer.

Mal stands, pondering, and his own gun is suddenly leveled at his head.

MAL
(not even looking)
Right now, I'd take it as a particular favor if you was to squishy up my brain.

Instead, she circles him cautiously, hopping into the co-pilot's seat and working the screens without even looking at them.

Zoe enters at a run.

ZOE
Mal! River got loose!

MAL
(deadpan)
Are you sure?

She sees the sitch, levels her own weapon on River.

MAL
(continuing)
Ease off, Zoe.

ZOE
She attacked Simon.

MAL
(more wary)
That right.
(to River)
You know your brother just wants to protect you...?

RIVER
He was going to make me sleep.

MAL
Anyone checking for wounded?

ZOE
Yes sir.

WASH
Why exactly is she mucking about with my charts?

Something comes on the big screen: the solar system. Then the edge. Then the last planet out, which is dark. Text runs next to it.

ZOE
What is that?

MAL
Blackrock.

INARA
Meaning...?

MAL
It's the furthest planet out. Uninhabitable. Before the war, there was a terraforming event, something went wrong... took a lot of settlers, way I heard. It was in the press a bit.

WASH
Why are we looking at it?

INARA
Oh.

She moves forward, slowly. Eyes on the screen.

INARA
(continuing)
"Oh brave new world, that has such people in it." It's called blackrock now because it's not livable. Before, though, when it was new, when they were talking about flying in the first settlements... they'd named it "Miranda."

WASH
That never came up on the search?

INARA
It's not listed here, either.

ZOE
But I remember it too. There wasn't much news, because the war was so near beginning.

River is is bundled up in the chair, not looking at anyone, quietly crying. Simon steps in, unsteadily. River moves quickly towards him, but he instinctively jerks away and she stops.

MAL
Doc, please help the others outside.

River has left Mal's gun on the console and the moment she steps away Mal takes it and holsters it, coming forward and touching River's arm.

MAL
(continuing)
You scared him, is all. He'll mend.
(turning her)
You remember this planet?

RIVER
She remembers. Dr Caron. She told them.

MAL
Why is Miranda so important?

She looks around, wincing, unable to answer.

INARA
You know, it's not that far from us.

WASH
(comes up the ladder)
Uh, belay that thought, friend.
(touching the screen)
Wider.

The image shows Miranda and a few other planets and moons. Wash points to a small moon on one side.

WASH
(continuing)
Here's adorable us. Here's Miranda. All this space in between? That's Reaver territory. Nobody goes in there. Or, nobody comes out... Mal?

This last because he has rather suddenly exited.

EXT. SERENITY - AFTERNOON

Mal exits the front of the ship, the others from upstairs hesitantly following. The ramp is down. Book is already coming back up, shaking his head: no luck. Jayne is further behind, supporting a crying Kaylee. Simon kneels over the body of Dresden. He's also dead.

BOOK
No one. Not one single...

MAL
Get the bodies together.

BOOK
Do we have time for gravedigging?

MAL
We're not burying them.

He surveys the ship -- part of the Alliance jet that it squashed is sticking out the side, including the smashed cockpit.

Mal starts giving orders rapidfire.

MAL
(continuing)
Zoe, you and Simon drag out the bodies and rope 'em together. I want them laid out on the nose of our ship.

BOOK
Are you insane?

ZOE
(to Book)
No, no... I understand what he's doing.
(to Mal)
Are you insane?

KAYLEE
What do you mean, the bodies...

MAL
Kaylee, I need us spaceworthy. Then I need you to muck the reactor core, just enough to leave a trail and make it read like we're flying without containment, not enough to fry us.

KAYLEE
These people are our friends --

MAL
Kaylee, you got two days of work to do and four hours to do it.
(turns from her)
Jayne, you and Wash haul that cannon mount out of the mine. Goes right on top. Piece or two of the other ship, stick it on. Any place you can tear hull without inner breach, do that too.
(looking around)
And we're gonna need paint. We're gonna need red paint.

INARA
(getting it)
<Oh merciful Buddha protect us...>

ZOE
Sir. Do you really mean to turn our home into an abomination so we can make a suicidal attempt at passing through Reaver space?

MAL
I mean to live. I mean for us to live. Jude won't have that, so we go where he won't follow.

JAYNE
God's balls, there's no way we're going out there!

And everybody (save River) is talking at once:

BOOK
What is the point of living if you sink to the level of a savage --

WASH
There's nothing about this plan that isn't horrific!

INARA
Please, we should talk this over --

JAYNE
I ain't takin' orders from a man has lost his brainstem --

And in the middle of it, Mal pulls his gun. Jayne, the most in his face, steps back, hand on his.

MAL
This is how it works. Anybody doesn't wanna fly with me anymore, this is your port of harbour. There's a lot of fine ways to die. I'm not waiting for the Alliance to choose mine.

He walks forward, through the group, toward the smashed cockpit.

ANGLE: THE COCKPIT

Struggling to get out is the badly wounded pilot. He sees Mal coming and raises his hands in surrender.

Mal shoots him in the head, turns back.

MAL
(continuing)
I mean to confound those killers, and take my shot at getting to Miranda, maybe finding out what all I'm dying for. That's my theme now. So I hear any word out of any of you that ain't helping me out or taking your leave I will fucking shoot you.

He walks to one side, grabs a body -- it's Dresden's. He drops it at Zoe's feet as he heads into the ship.

MAL
(continuing)
Get to work.

EXT. SERENITY - EVENING

Book is with Simon and Zoe. They are roping the bodies, all lined up, together. He is dragging them into the line, then reading over each.

SIMON
What about the children?

A beat, as they consider... it's too horrible.

ZOE
Strap 'em to their mothers, if you can tell who's who.
(more)

ZOE (cont'd)
They'll mostly burn in atmo, be a kind of pyre for 'em.

BOOK
Mounted like trophies... it's beyond sacrilege. How could the Captain care so little for these people?

ZOE
They're useful.

SIMON
That is a tired refrain.

BOOK
This isn't mere practicality. It's madness.

ZOE
Little bit, yes. But I been through a war with Mal and seen what it done.

SIMON
You were in that same war. But you live almost like a person might; you have an actual relationship -- a marriage. You didn't turn into some... Gorgon...

ZOE
I'm career Army, my whole family is. I was already in when the war started. Mal volunteered. He joined the fight because he believed. He believed his planet should be left alone. Believed we would win if we gave our hearts to it, that his generals wouldn't lay down arms while his men were still dying around him... that God would help us in our darkest place.

She cinches a knot tight, moves to the next body.

ZOE
(continuing)
See, that's the difference between Mal and me. All I ever lost was a war.

The three are quiet, and continue work.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON:

THE BODIES as they BURN, flames passing over them and suddenly flickering out as dark falls. They are patches of leathered flesh stretched over bone -- monsters, screaming soundlessly in the nothing of space.

We arm past them to the windows of the bridge, looking in at Mal, watching, with Zoe behind and Wash at the helm. We get close enough to bring up dialogue.

Mal is still looking forward as he tells Wash:

MAL
Head for Miranda on a 932er. You pick up anything on long range, cut thrust and side-step it.

WASH
(clearly unhappy)
No sir.

MAL
What?

WASH
Reavers don't cut thrust till they're where they're going, and they never get out of the way. Isn't that us now? Big Bad Wolf?

MAL
That's us.
(to Zoe)
Just holler if you spot anything.

ZOE
Yes sir.

WASH
(to himself)
Big Bad Wolf...

He leaves the bridge and as he does we pull back out to see the whole of Serenity for the first time: It is hardly recognizable. Charred corpses on the nose, Cannon atop with a space-suited corpse draped within, long scars, welded-on parts and war paint... the trail of green light burns out with sporadic bursts of vapor.

It looks, for all the world, like a Reaver ship.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Mal comes down the stairs to the catwalk. He hesitates, then steps into the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

It's dark in here. Mal stands with his back to the door, no light on his face, shaking slightly. Not crying, but overcome.

INARA
Come sit.

He looks up: and there's Inara, sitting on what was once her bed, only slivers of light cutting across her.

MAL
Didn't know you were there.

INARA
I figured that.

MAL
(sitting)
You don't have to stay here, you know. There's empty rooms, if you wanna sleep awhile.

INARA
Do you think anyone's set to sleep? Simon's portioning out overdoses of morphine, just in case.

MAL
Cheerful fellow.

He looks around.

MAL
(continuing)
You ever miss this place?

INARA
(smiling)
Not right now....

He smiles as well --- a moment between two weary warriors.

INARA
(continuing)
I just didn't feel comfortable anywhere else. It's smaller than I remembered.

MAL
Your new digs is spacious. Better for entertaining.

INARA
Better.

MAL
So how many has it been? Clients.

INARA
There are so many levels on which that's none of your business.

MAL
Come on, death on the doorstep, can't be truthsome with an old friend?

INARA
Well, let's see, five months, minimum three hour visit, plus regulars and extended contracts, allowing holidays...
(does the math in her head)
... none.

MAL
None.

INARA
I've been teaching, Mal, you know that.

MAL
So, none.

INARA
Let it go, Mal.

MAL
I did that once.

That was more serious than either of them expected. A moment, and he rises, quietly flustered.

MAL
(continuing)
I should go see how the inevitable mutiny is coming along.

INARA
Yes. Good. Do.

MAL
But we live the day, we're gonna circle back to this matter of "none", though. And if I die, I will haunt you.

He leaves.

INARA
(quietly)
I know.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

Serenity flies, silent.

INT. FOREDECK HALL/BRIDGE - NIGHT

We are pulling back. There is still no sound but score as the group, variously, make their way toward the bridge. Those close enough to get a view out the window are looking somewhat freaked -- those already on the bridge are stock still. The last to enter frame, as she is pressed right up against the glass of the window, is River.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Reverse to see: an armada.

The black sky is filled with what must be ninety ships in a vague cluster, as Serenity breaks frame headed toward them. Most of them hang still in the air. Some move swimmingly about. Some just turn in gentle drifts, as though looking around.

Each is different -- each a hodgepodge of pillaged ships, all painted and stripped to look as predatory as possible. They range from tiny warships to whale-like carriers five times Serenity's size. And one or two of them were once Fireflies.

Three ships suddenly peel off -- and head just past Serenity, on a raiding mission.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As the gang reacts, and Mal switches off the lights in the cockpit.

They all wait, tensed up, as they approach the armada...

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

And arrive, moving slowly through the ranks of ships.

ANGLE: WASH

Steers very carefully.

ANGLE: SERENITY

As it passes a large, bizarrely shaped ship, the ship, turns, as though watching it. But lets it pass.

Another minute, and Serenity is through the Armada, headed for the small planet just beyond.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Everyone looks around them, unable to believe that nothing happened, and there is a **ROAR** --

-- that is just the ship in Miranda's atmosphere.

INT. BRIDGE - LATER

Timecut: now Kaylee, Simon and River have left the bridge. The clouds fog the windows, so nothing below is visible.

ZOE
Every reading I'm getting says normal. Oceans, land masses... no tectonic instability or radiation...

WASH
Yeah, but no power, either.

MAL
Nothing at all?

WASH
Wait. Something. Might be a beacon, but it's awful weak.

MAL
Find it.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

As she touches down, filling the frame. After a moment Mal, Zoe and Jayne emerge from the airlock in full suits and armed. Zoe reads a handheld scanner...

MAL
Gravity's Earthnorm.

ZOE
O2 levels check, pressure... if there's anything wrong the scanner isn't reading it.

Mal pulls off his helmet. Breathes, looking around him.

MAL
Well something sure as hell ain't right...

WIDER ANGLE: Serenity is parked in the middle of a **CITY**. Not as big as Sihnon, but less rustic than anything else we've seen. Gleaming metal, spread out for miles in every direction. Small portions have been decimated by fires or explosions long since cold, others are overgrown with weeds, but most of the city is intact. So silent, as if trapped in amber.

CLOSE ON: the three, looking about.

JAYNE
This ain't no little settlement.

ZOE
We flew over at least a dozen cities just as big. Why didn't we hear about this?

MAL
Beacon's up ahead.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Out of their suits now, Mal, Zoe and Jayne take point as the entire crew walks along the street, looking about them.

ZOE
Ho.

She moves rapidly, gun out, to:

ANGLE: A SKELETON

Face-down on the ground, clothes tattered.

She examines it as Mal approaches, waving the others back.

ZOE
(continuing)
No entry wound, fractures...

MAL
Poison?

JAYNE (O.S.)
Got another one!

ANGLE: JAYNE

Is by a downed hovercraft. Inside are the skeletons of three people: two grown-ups and a small child strapped in the back. Clothes in better condition, and again no sign of violence.

JAYNE
They's all just sittin'. Didn't crash...

ANGLE: RIVER is quietly becoming more and more upset.

CLOSE ON: KAYLEE walks in front of an office building, staying away from the cars as she hears:

JAYNE (O.S.)
Couple more here...

Kaylee takes another step -- and the glassy-eyed corpse of a man is pressed up against the glass walk right behind her. Mouth open, skin dead blue, terribly skinny... a thing to haunt.

SIMON
(seeing it)
Kaylee... Come this way. Come here. Don't --

But she looks --

KAYLEE
GAAAAaaoh God --

-- and steps back, horrified, as the others approach the building.

It's an office. About half the employees are there, in chairs or on the ground, all in the same state as the first fellow, whose desk was on a dais, hence his being at eye level when he is still in his chair.

We see angles of the corpses as the gang evaluates...

JAYNE
How come they're preserved?

MAL
Place must've gone hermetic when the power blew. Sealed 'em in.

KAYLEE
(very upset)
What're they doing? What's everybody doing?

SIMON
There's no discoloration, nobody's doubled over or showing signs of pain...

MAL
There's gasses that kill painless, right?

INARA
They didn't fall down. None of them. They just lay down.

SIMON
More than anything, it looks like starvation.

MAL
Anybody want to bet there's plenty of food all around?

INARA
They just lay down...

They notice River now, in the middle of the street, keening. She drops to her knees, clutching her head, as Simon and the others rush to her.

RIVER
<Merciful God please take me away>, make them stop, they're everywhere, every city every house every room, they're all inside me, I can hear them all and they're saying **nothing**! **GET UP**! **PLEASE, GET THEM UP**! <I will close my ears and my heart and I will be a stone>, please God make me a stone...

JAYNE
(upset)
She's starting to damage my calm.

ZOE
Jayne --

JAYNE
She's right! Everybody's dead! This whole world is dead for no reason!

BOOK
Let's get to the beacon.

EXT. LANDING STRIP - DAY

It's small -- landing is easier in cities with flying vehicles. At the end of a short runway, tipped and damaged, is an Alliance Research Vessel. The gang makes its way towards it.

INT. RESEARCH VESSEL - DAY

It's a mess, doors pried open, signs of violence but no bodies. The gang walks through it, looking around.

River pulls away from Simon, suddenly determined. She approaches a console, and a cylindrical object about the size of a can of tennis balls. She turns it slightly --

A hologram not unlike the one jude watched in the beginning of the film squawks to life amidst them all. They start, moving out of it, and Watch. DOCTOR CARON, a sort of Jane Goodall-looking female scientist, is standing exactly where she was, leaving her message...

... as she speaks, we see angles of everyone watching, taking it in... River silently mouths every word.

CARON
-- just a few of the images we've recorded, and you can see it isn't... it isn't what we thought. There's been no war here, and no terraforming event. The environment is stable. It's the Pax. G-32 Paxilon Hydroclorate that we added to the air processors. It wasn't rendered poisonous, as some of the team had feared. It's...
(more)

CARON (cont'd)
(tearing up)
...well it works... it was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression. Make a peaceful... it worked. The people here stopped fighting. And then they stopped everything else. They stopped going to work, stopped breeding... talking... eating...
(trying for control)
There's eighty million people here and they all just let themselves die. They didn't even kill themselves. They just... most starved. When they stopped working the power grids, there were overloads, fires -- people burned to death sitting in their chairs. Just sitting.

There is a loud bang somewhere behind her -- she starts, gathers herself.

CARON
(continuing)
I have to be quick. There was no one working the receptors when we landed, so we hit pretty hard. We can't leave. We can't take any of the local transports because...

The bang again.

CARON
(continuing)
There are people... they're not people... about a tenth of a percent of the population had the opposite reaction to the Pax. Their aggressor response increased... beyond madness. They've become... they've killed most of us... not just killed, they've done... things.

WASH
(quietly)
Reavers... they made them...

CARON
I won't live to report this, and we haven't got power to... people have to know...
(loses it here)
... We meant it for the best... to make people safer... to... God!

She whirls, grabs a gun and fires -- then aims the gun at her own head - but a Reaver is on her, knocks the gun away and bites her face --

She **screams** continuously as the Reaver tops her, biting at her and tearing at her clothes, at her skin.

JAYNE
(quietly)
Turn it off.

Wash does, nobody saying anything.

Mal walks outside.

EXT. RESEARCH VESSEL - CONTINUING

He takes a few unsteady steps away from the vessel. Inara appears behind him, follows -- he holds a hand out behind him, seemingly to make her stop, but then he grabs her shoulder, holds her for support. She puts her hand over his.

MAL
I seen so much death... I been on fields carpeted with bodies, friends and enemies -- I seen men and women blown to messes no further from me than you.

INARA
Mal...

MAL
But every single one of those people died on their feet. Fighting. Or, hell, running away -- doing summat to get through. This is...

INARA
Mal, I need your help with this. I need you to help me walk this, because I can't --

He looks at her, folds her into his arms. Holds her, looking out at nothing.

INT. RESEARCH VESSEL - CONTINUING

River falls to her knees, vomiting. Simon goes to her, puts his hand on her back, lets her ride it out.

SIMON
River...

RIVER
I'm all right.

She looks at him, wet eyes full of clarity.

RIVER
(continuing)
I'm all right.

Wash takes the recording cylinder, pulls it out of the console.

INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The cylinder is slammed down on the table. By Mal, who stands at the head of the table, looking at his crew.

MAL
Near as we can figure, this report is at least twelve years old. It was probably buried by Parliament, and unearthed by the Military Command a short spell before they saw River. Why they haven't nuked this place into dust-motes is a mystery to me. Might be they couldn't make their minds up, or they feared puttin' a spotlight on the Reavers. Might be they got nukes on their way right now. What I know for sure is that there's a universe of folk that need to know about this.
(touches the cylinder)
They need to **see** it. Somebody has to speak for these people.

He pauses. Everyone waits.

MAL
(continuing)
I've had one idea in mind for a long while now: Keep my ship in the air. Keep them as are on it safe.
(more)

MAL (cont'd)
You all got on this boat for different reasons, but you all come to the same place. So now I'm asking more of you than I have before. You know I can't leave you here. Got nowhere else to run... and I don't feel to be runnin' any more. I conjure we got one shot at getting this broadcast wide -- wide enough it can't be hid. But the cost'll be high. More'n likely, it'll be everything. I don't wanna be asking that of you. Any of you. Here I am doin' it anyway.

There is a beat as he eyes them all.

JAYNE
My grandma always told me: if you can't do something smart, do something right.

By way of emphasis he loudly cocks his big-ass rifle. Mal takes in the fact that everyone assumes Jayne has spoken for them all.

MAL
That the same grandma told you there was an evil dwarf spirit living in your well?

JAYNE
(nodding)
She was a fun grandma.

SIMON
Do we have a plan?

MAL
Mr Universe. He'll have the equipment to put this on every screen for thirty worlds. He's pretty damn close, too.

RIVER
Based on our orbital trajectories, he reached optimum proximity just before our sunset. If we make a direct run within the hour we're only 67,332 miles out. At full burn we'd reach him inside of three hours.

She doesn't notice the reactions to her sudden clarity -- she's still somewhat in her own world.

WASH
Still got the Reavers, and probably the Alliance between us and him.

MAL
It's a fair bet the Alliance knows full well about Mr Universe. But I believe a straight shot is still our best bet.

ZOE
They're gonna see this coming.

Mal looks at her.

MAL
No.

He takes a long moment, his jaw tightening imperceptibly.

MAL
(continuing)
They're not gonna see **this** coming.

CLOSE ON: One of Serenity's jet engines, as it FIRES up.

EXT. CITY - AFTERNOON

Serenity is taking off, leaving the dead place behind.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

He's talking with Mal and Wash again, very animated.

MR UNIVERSE
It's no problem! Bring it on bring it on bring it on! From here to the eyes and ears of the 'verse, that's my motto, or it might be if I start having a motto.

MAL (ON SCREEN)
We won't be long.

MR UNIVERSE
You're gonna get caught in the ion cloud, it'll play merry hob with your radar, but pretty pretty lights and a few miles after you'll be right in my orbit.
(to the lovebot)
Lenore! I'm talking.... No, I have respect, you -- **you need to respect my process!**
(to Mal)
You shouldn't have had to see that.

MAL (ON SCREEN)
Love is the devil.

MR UNIVERSE
You noticed that too?

MAL (ON SCREEN)
You'll let us know if anyone else comes at you?

DROP BACK WIDE to see: Jude and twenty soldiers are in the room, visible to Mr Universe but not to the screen.

MR UNIVERSE
You'll be the first.

Mr. Universe hangs his head as Mal's image winks out and Jude approaches him.

JUDE
You were supposed to ask him where he was coming from.

MR UNIVERSE
Or, a sign, on my forehead that says "There's a hundred government tools standing in the room with me". Both of those are options, there's pros and cons...

JUDE
You're probably right.
(to his men)
Destroy every Cortex connection. We won't be showing any dramas from here.

MR UNIVERSE
My beating heart, you fiends...

The men start smashing things. Sparks fly. Jude addresses his ensign:

JUDE
Pull every ship in the area, every cruiser, freight vessel, freelance. Serenity comes out of that cloud, all this ends.

MR UNIVERSE
Then why do you gotta trash my world?

JUDE
Because life is uncertain.

He exits frame and the camera pushes in on the despondent Mr Universe.

MR UNIVERSE
Lenore, did you see what --

Jude's sword **lunges** through his belly, stopping his mouth. A moment, and Jude pulls the sword out again, leaving a shocked Mr Universe gasping his last.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We are amongst the Reaver armada. Serenity slices quietly through the ships, as we come around and see Miranda receding in the distance.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Jayne and Book silently check many many weapons.

JAYNE
All that death... and the best we can come up with is to ride right into more of it. What's that called?

BOOK
(quietly)
Ironic.

JAYNE
Yeah.
(beat)
How long do you figure it'd take you to read over all them folk down there?

BOOK
(still quiet)
The rest of my life.

He looks over at Jayne, goes back to work.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is piloting, Zoe beside him. They look out into the sea of ships, tense and quiet. After a while...

ZOE
(quietly)
We make it out of this, you and me are gonna make a baby.

Wash thinks about it.

WASH
Let's make a lot.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity drifts through the armada -- and suddenly another ship fires up, catches up next to it, other ships passing between as the Reaver ship paces Serenity...

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash watches his screen as Zoe watches through the window.

ZOE
Sir, are you seeing this?

MAL (O.S.)
(over the com)
Looks like we've been made. how long til we clear the herd?

WASH
Thirty seconds...

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

Kaylee is working with great focus.

MAL (ON THE COM)
Kaylee, we good to go?

KAYLEE
(lifting her hands off as though being timed)
We're patched up.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Jayne is laying out weapons as Mal's voice comes over the com in here.

MAL (O.S.)
Okay. Everybody tense up. This is the part where it gets funny.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

The two ships pace each other, another big vessel coming about as though staring at Serenity, who comes closer and closer to frame, till we see the suited corpse draped on the cannon.

It suddenly moves: it's Mal.

He swings the cannon round and fires successive, percussive bursts at the ship pacing them. It BLOWS, fragmenting into burning bits that spiral into other ships, causing two smaller ones to blow as well.

Mal swings around and fires on the other side, at the biggest ship he can find, causing a couple of internal explosions but not destroying the vessel.

It is a wonderland of flame and chaos -- but it is silent, except in:

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Where Wash and Zoe shake from the concussive waves of the nearby explosion.

MAL (O.S.)
Wash! Go!

EXT. CANNON MOUNT - CONTINUING

Mal looks as every ship in the armada starts to turn towards them --

-- and a piece of exploded ship spins flamingly right at his head -- He ducks down in the gun turret --

MAL
GO NOW!

And the firefly effect lights up, Mal watching from down low as the glow plays off his helmet -- and the Reaver armada is suddenly receding incredibly fast behind him.

ANGLE: THE REAVER SHIPS

They start off after Serenity, a few of them firing missiles ahead of them. Most of them will take some time getting up to speed, but some rip out with bursts of fire. One in particular, let's call it HUNTER, is the most sleek (though stripped) and powerful of the fleet. Two sections of it open up and reveal engines as unfathomable as the Firefly's, whirling and spewing dark red energy -- and then it bolts out past the others.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH
We got a head start here but it ain't much.

ZOE
Missiles coming in...

EXT. TOP OF SHIP - CONTINUING

Mal grabs what is clearly a home-made device, about the size of a coffee can (but not an actual coffee can, it should be noted). He twists a couple of wires and tosses it up -- the ship leaves it miles behind in an instant.

ANGLE: THE DEVICE

As it starts to glow -- and the two missiles fired go straight for it and explode -- at least one ship flying into the explosion and also blowing up. A moment later, other ships skirt it, heading after Serenity -- then the Hunter, gaining on them all.

She actually bumps one ship out of the way, sending it spiraling.

ANGLE: MAL

Seeing the Hunter bearing down on them.

MAL
Okay, trouble...

He pops up and swings the gun at the back, firing on the Hunter -- a couple hits, mostly impacting on the surface, not much damage.

WASH (O.S.)
Mal, get inside!

MAL
Little busy...

Gun turrets open on the hunter -- Mal targets them, knocking one out before it can fire. The second rakes Serenity -- some damage, but it misses Mal, who takes it out -- but the Hunter is getting closer --

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

Book is looking at a read-out of damage...

BOOK
Reactor's holding... wouldn't like to take another hit, though...

KAYLEE
(looking pensive)
Adjuster's fried.

BOOK
How do you --

KAYLEE
I can smell it.

And in a second she's grabbing a chain and hitting a lever, being pulled up to the ceiling, where she kicks off a panel and wriggles into the crawlspace above.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
Starboard navs are fused! Get me an alligator and three 64s!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash hits the com:

WASH
Kaylee, I got deep starboard drift here!

KAYLEE
(poking her head out)
I'm on it!

WASH
Work faster!

KAYLEE
Fly better!

EXT. TOP OF SHIP - CONTINUING

Mal fires -- and runs out of ammo. The Hunter is practically right on top of them now.

MAL
I'm coming in!

He starts to climb out of the cannon turret -- and a hatch opens on the bottom of the Hunter. Three metal discs the size of landmines fly out, attached to cables. They lock onto Serenity's hull magnetically, and before Mal can make a move three Reavers in spacesuits slide down between the ships.

They carry mean-looking blades, and even their suits are creepy: a hodgepodge of items stolen or ripped -- physically ripped -- off, still caked with blood. Metal "claws" duct-taped to their knuckles and knees.

The Hunter backs off a bit as the cables snap free at the other end. Mal scrambles toward the front of the ship, but the closest reaver takes his free-floating cable and whips it around Mal, pulls him back and off his feet. Mal just manages to grab the cannon barrel, but it continues to arc around and the Reaver gets in close and swipes at him with a blade. Mal goes around once more and this time he's ready -- he brings up both feet and kicks the Reaver in the helmet, sends him flying back into nothing -- as Mal swings back the opposite way from the force of it.

At that same moment the second two converge -- Mal gets his footing enough to grab the hand of one, stop the blade from piercing his suit -- but the other one swipes and cuts a deep gash in the chest --

Mal looks down to see his inner lining is still intact. He twists the hand of the one Reaver and shoves the blade into the stomach of the second. Air rushes out and the Reaver thrashes in agony and sudden frozen death. Still Mal grapples with the last one...

WASH (O.S.)
Mal, we're heading near light meteoric debris...

MAL
Go around it!

WASH (O.S.)
Can't!

ZOE (O.S.)
Mal, at this speed a grain of sand'll kill you!

MAL
That's nice...

The Reaver gets in close, smearing its horrible, bloody face all over its faceplate, baring sharpened teeth at Mal. It's stronger than he is, and begins to twist the blade back at Mal.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Zoe looks at her screen.

ZOE
Couple thousand miles....

WASH
(into com)
Kaylee!

INT. CRAWLSPACE - CONTINUING

Kaylee works with fierce concentration. She drops a tool -- we hear it clatter far below.

EXT. TOP OF SHIP - CONTINUING

Mal is up against the turret -- can't keep this guy off much longer --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

We see past Zoe and wash to what looks like a small dust cloud approaching --

ZOE
(into com)
Find cover NOW!

EXT. TOP OF SHIP - CONTINUING

Mal stops pushing and drops to the roof just behind the cannon turret.

The Reaver brings back his arm for the death blow -- and a tiny, silent puff hits it. He looks ahead and suddenly his helmet and suit are dotted with tiny holes, the glass cracking and exploding out as tiny pebbles go through him a four times the speed of a bullet.

Mal stays down, the meteor dust impacting harmlessly on the turret as the Reaver floats off, all dead.

INT. CRAWLSPACE - CONTINUING

Kaylee finishes the fix and we see wires glow with new life.

KAYLEE
We're up!

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash banks hard, out of the tiny minefield of rock.

ZOE
(into come)
We're clear, Mal.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

MAL
Are you very very sure?

ZOE (ON THE COM)
Make your move, sir.

Mal crawls to safety, pulling open the hatch and plunging in headfirst.

As he dives in, we see the armada behind, not gaining, but not going away.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Zoe looks at her screen, at the following ships.

WASH
They're never giving up, are they?

ZOE
That's the idea...

WASH
Honey, when Mal was your Sergeant in the war, did any... other members of you platoon, say... live?

ZOE
The answer will only make you unhappy.

EXT. SPACE - LATER

Serenity flies, the Reavers follow. We come around behind them all to see the luminescent ION CLOUD dead ahead.

EXT. SATELLITE - NIGHT

In close orbit waits the Alliance force, at least fifty strong, and clearly with high tech firepower.

We focus in on Jude's ship, in the middle of the cluster.

INT. JUDE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As Jude waits with the others.

HELMSMAN
I'm reading activity in the cloud but I can't pin it down.

JUDE
We'll have a visual soon enough.
(into com)
Incoming vessel is a transport, Firefly class, should be heading straight for us. Lock and fire on my command.
(to himself)
It's a bad death.

ENSIGN
Sir?

JUDE
Killed at a distance, in the middle of nothing... they deserved better.

HELMSMAN
Sir!

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

It's pretty much Jude's POV: the swirling Ion cloud as Serenity breaks through and heads at us, fully reavered out.

INT. JUDE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

He looks slightly confused at her appearance. Then smiles at the cleverness. Hits the com:

JUDE
Vessel in range, lock on...
(again to himself, admiringly)
Bastard's not even changing course...

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

As Serenity get a bit closer, **FIFTY REAVER SHIPS** suddenly burst from the cloud, also heading straight at us.

INT. JUDE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Jude -- and everyone around him - goes big-eyed.

JUDE
Son of a **BITCH**!!

HELMSMAN
(freaking)
Sir?

JUDE
Target the Reavers!
(into com)
Target the Reavers! Target everyone! Somebody **FIRE**!

EXT. SPACE -- CONTINUING

Serenity suddenly lists hard to port, dropping down until she's almost upside down, coming at the Alliance ships as they FIRE, missing Serenity but Tagging a few Reaver ships, none of whom have slowed down --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal is back on the bridge as we look out at the upside down Alliance fleet, missiles just passing us --

MAL
We're too close for them to arm --

ZOE
This is gonna be very tight --

JAYNE
(entering)
Hey look, we're upside down.

Zoe and Mal shoot a look at Jayne.

WASH
(to himself)
I am a leaf on the wind, watch how I soar.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

A lot happens now.

Serenity slips right under Jude's ship and ducks and weaves between dozens more. A couple of them fire, but hit only their own ships.

The Reaver force hits the Alliance head on -- and several ships do just that, smashing into bigger ships kamikaze-style, everything exploding --

The fleet mobilizes, blasting Reaver ships, circling around, and an air war begins, a frenzied, balletic ecstasy of destruction that the camera hurtles through as ships and parts of ships fly at and past it.

ANGLE: SERENITY

She nearly makes it all the way through the alliance fleet before a barrelling chunk of debris -- which is twice their size -- forces them to come hard about and remain in the fray, dodging everything the chaos of battle can throw at them.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal looks out at the chaos...

MAL
Chickens' come home to roost...

They are suddenly JOLTED by a glancing blow from anther ship -- Wash struggles to control her --

MAL
(continuing)
the hell --

WASH
(panicky)
It's okay! I am a leaf on the wind!

MAL
(also panicky)
What does that mean?

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

ANGLE: A REAVER SHIP has piggy-backed onto another ship with magnetic grapplers.

INT. ALLIANCE SHIP - CONTINUING

We see a very short, frantic view of Alliance soldiers being cut down, dragged off, skinned, raped --

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity makes her way past the carnage and heads down toward the tiny satellite moon -- with an alliance warship in pursuit.

INT. JUDE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Jude watches his screen as his ship efficiently mows down Reavers -- He's only concerned with Serenity.

PILOT
(on Jude's com)
The fugitives are heading into atmo --

JUDE
Lock missiles.

Jude looks up --

ANGLE: THROUGH THE WINDOW we see a Reaver ship heading straight for them.

Jude blinks once.

Then he bolts for the side hall -- the Reaver craft **explodes** through the window, filling the bridge and Jude is pulled violently BACK toward the bridge but the security doors SLAM shut, cutting him off from the depressurized chaos as he slams backwards into them and falls painfully to the floor.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUING

Serenity has reached Atmosphere, is bucking in the clouds. Whip behind it to see the warship in pursuit. From it we hear, static-y and broken:

PILOT
Sir? Permission to fire?

INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - CONTINUING

ZOE
He's behind us, missiles hot --

WASH
Can't outrun them...

MAL
No we can't.

He takes the copilot seat, starts working buttons.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

We see the shuttle on the left start to move out away from the ship. A moment, and it disengages -- flying back off the ship like an ejector seat, spinning wildly --

ANGLE: THE WARSHIP

We see from in the cockpit the clouds rushing at us.

PILOT
No response. Firing miss --

And the spinning shuttle whips at us and smashes everything to blackness.

EXT. JUDE'S SHIP - CONTINUING

The Reaver ship is stuck in its head as it drifts, the battle raging behind it --

INT. JUDE'S SHIP - CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

As the ship shakes violently, Jude is walking quickly to a door marked: DART. Below that: Authorized Personnel Only. Jude puts his thumb to a panel and the door slides up to reveal a standing, almost formfitting one-man cockpit.

EXT. JUDE'S SHIP - CONTINUING

As the Dart disengages and bullets down towards the surface.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As she continues down, the black, metallic expanse of Mr Universe's little moon complex sprawling below them. A moment after Serenity blows through frame, so does the HUNTER.

The hunter fires an electronic pulse at Serenity and sparks fly.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH
We're fried! I got no control!

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

Sparks -- and arcs of electricity -- are everywhere here. Kaylee jumps back as she is electrocuted -- Book grabs her and pulls her out of the room just as Simon runs in from the hall and slams the door shut on the erupting fires.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

MAL
Where's the back up? Where's the back up?

He and Wash are frantically flipping buttons -- the ship whirs to a semblance of life --

ZOE
Back up reads at 20%
(to Wash)
Can you get us down?

WASH
I'm gonna have to glide her in!

ZOE
Will that work?

WASH
Long as that landing strip is made of fluffy pillows...

MAL
(on the com)
Everybody to the upper decks!
Strap yourselves to something!

EXT. LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

We can see it, a long strip, which halfway along becomes a kind of hanger. Serenity arcs at it uncomfortably fast.

INT. AFT HALL - CONTINUING

Inara and River come up from below. Inara hits a the wall and an emergency seat folds out -- Book and Simon starts hoisting a dazed Kaylee onto it as River unfolds three more --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is fighting the stick with extreme concentration as Zoe pulls out a seat as well, straps in.

EXT/ LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

And Serenity HITS the ground, moving forward in what would be a perfect 747 landing if, like a 747, this ship had wheels.

as it is, it's insanely jolting -- the landing gear folds and snaps under the weight -- the ship keeps going, now inside the hanger, heading towards the entrance to the facility, slowing, sparks shooting out behind it, slowing, fishtailing and coming about a full one eighty as it stops a very few feet from the wall.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

There is a moment of quiet.

WASH
I am a leaf in the wind. Watch --

And the **ROAR** and light of the Hunter setting down at the entrance shuts him up.

EXT. LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

We see the ship about to touch down, engines folding in like an egrets wings. A second Reaver vessel enters frame from above, about to land next to it.

EXT. INT. SERENITY - MOMENTS LATER

The inner doors open and the entire crew piles out, all heavily bedecked with weapons.

MAL
Head inside!

After everyone is off, Mal turns and looks at the ship one last time.

MAL
(continuing; quietly)
Thanks for the ride.

He takes off.

INT. STORAGE CHAMBER/BLACK ROOM/INNER HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The gang races through a large room filled with stored parts and huge machines. A small double-sized doorway leads to the "black Room", which is the entrance proper to the facility. Mr Universe has it lit entirely with black-light, with a huge spray-painted glowing orange arrow on the ceiling pointing toward the inner hall with the word "Deliveries" beside it.

Wash hits a button and huge, thick, blast doors open from the sides AND the top and bottom, creating the effect of a square hole getting bigger The hall itself is smaller than the black room, but still has the arrows on the ceiling, that point to an elevator some fifty feet away.

MAL
Least we know where we're going -- Kaylee, check out that lift for traps.

Inara helps her off to look it over.

ZOE
Sir.

He turns to her.

ZOE
(continuing)
This is a good hold point.

MAL
We all stay together --

ZOE
No. They have to come through here; they'll bottleneck and we can thin 'em out. We get pushed back there's the blast doors.

JAYNE
She's right. Past here it's a maze and they could come around any which way.

WASH
I can rig the doors so they won't re-open once they close.

MAL
Then shut 'em and hide til --

ZOE
We need to draw them til it's done. This is the place. We'll buy you the time.

We hear savage SCREAMS from beyond the storage chamber -- they're approaching.

Mal looks around him at his crew.

MAL
Move those crates back there for cover -- and make sure they ain't filled with anything goes boom.

Everyone complies save Zoe, Jayne and Wash. Mal looks at Zoe.

ZOE
Go.

MAL
I ain't used to bein' ordered around by you, Zoe. It's kind of a turn on.

WASH
I'm standing right here...

Mal moves quickly to the door to the storage chamber:

ANGLE: HIS POV

Reavers rush toward them.

He turns to Jayne.

MAL
Jayne, tell me you brought 'em this time...

Jayne smiles, tosses Mal a grenade as he pops his own and **fastballs** it at the Reavers.

It **explodes** in their midst, smoke and man-parts flying about. Mal rolls his a much shorter distance, then slams the door shut.

ANGLE: THE GRENADE

Explodes, raining a bunch of equipment -- and part of a catwalk -- right in front of the door.

In the back room, the door nearly buckles from the explosion. everyone takes positions behind the crates. Mal moves through them as Wash tosses him the cylinder.

MAL
(continuing)
Don't shoot without aiming, head-shots preferred. Soon as this is broadcast I'll come right back, we work our way back to the ship.

KAYLEE
(returning)
Lift is clean.

MAL
You're my peach.

He passes Inara, the two of them holding a look for as long as they can. Then he's in the elevator and gone.

Zoe looks over her bunch: Wash, Inara and Simon are all nervous but competent. Jayne has adrenaline waterfalling all over his fear -- he's got a grin on, can't stop moving about. Kaylee's petrified. River appears to be thinking about something entirely not this, and Book... he looks lost. Zoe moves to him.

ZOE
You're shooting to kill, Shepherd.

BOOK
I know.

ZOE
They don't think about pain -- you wound 'em you wasted a bullet --

BOOK
I **know**.

ANGLE: KAYLEE AND SIMON

She tries sighting -- wipes the sweat off her shooting hand...

KAYLEE
I never been so nervous.

SIMON
You're gonna be okay.

KAYLEE
I don't know...

SIMON
Trust me. I'm a Doctor.

He smiles at her, and she is a mite comforted.

The door bursts open, the first Reaver trying to get through -- and four people shoot him at once.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator stops and Mal gets out, moving quickly, military style, looking for any Alliance troops. He encounters none, and makes his way to the island of screens and machines in the center of the space.

The first thing he takes in is that every broadwave port has been destroyed. The second:

ANGLE: MR UNIVERSE

Is lying dead, eyes open, half draped on his equally still lovebot. A trail of blood shows he crawled from his chair.

Mal comes close, to make sure. Nothing. He starts to move away again and the lovebot turns her head, her eyes focusing with an audible whir.

When she speaks, it is with surprisingly realistic expressiveness, and a warped, computery version of Mr Universe's voice.

LOVEBOT
Mal.

Mal stops.

LOVEBOT
(continuing)
Guy killed me, Mal. He killed me with a sword. How weird is that? I got... a short span here... they destroyed my equipment but I have a back-up unit... bottom of the complex, right over the generator. Hard to get to. I know they missed it. They can't stop the signal, Mal. They can never stop the signal.
(beat)
Okay this is painful. On many levels. I'm not --

She turns back, powering down. Recording over.

A beat, and Mal takes off.

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

More Reavers are coming through the door, our gang still holding them off noisily but efficiently.

Wash comes up and fires, plugs one in the head -- and is surprised by return fire. Everyone ducks down.

JAYNE
I thought Reavers weren't supposed to use guns!

WASH
Maybe he's not a very good one.

But more cover fire from the Reavers allows a couple to get in. They race across the room -- til Zoe pops up and plugs 'em simultaneously with two guns. She drops back down --

ZOE
Jayne! Grenade!

He pops it and tosses it just as more breach -- the blast takes most of them out, but one flies forward, skids and comes up right in front of Kaylee, hacking at her as she fires wildly, scoring wounds but not the kill -- he finally drops over the barricade and Jayne stands, firing, and picks him up to throw him off --

He twists and slices Jayne right up the back just as Book puts a gun to his ugly, cut-up head and fires.

Jayne drops to the ground, screaming -- Simon moves to him --

SIMON
Roll over!

Jayne does, and Simon rips the shirt open, examines the bloody gash.

JAYNE
I'm fine! Gimme a damn bandage!

SIMON
Feel that?

JAYNE
AAHH! Yes!

Simon's bag is over by Inara.

SIMON
Inara! Bandages.

She reaches in and pulls out a spraycan, tosses it to Simon.

Simon sprays the wound with a sort of foam that hardens instantly into an elastic covering.

ZOE
They're breaching!

And so they are, a good six of them pouring in and rushing the gang. The gang fires on them, scores a couple of kills, slows others down. But they're gaining ground.

River watches, the gun limp in her hand.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

A panel is kicked in from the ceiling and Jude drops down into the space, having clearly entered from a different location.

He looks around, carrying a laser-pistol. He moves past Mr Universe and Lenore -- who focusses again, her head turning as he passes, stopping him with:

LOVEBOT
Mal.
(Jude turns back)
Guy killed me, Mal.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal has reached it and surveys the situation.

Before him is a railing, and he can look down on the generator shaft. Not surprisingly, it's miles deep, with machines constantly rotating and grinding, and arcs of electricity ricochetting around it. Big ol' death pit.

On the other side is a small island of a platform, on which sits the console to broadcast the message from, protected a by clear (but unbreakable) plastic partition. There are cables and chains running along the ceiling, but the only feasible way across is a series of ladder rungs over the pit. There is a slim, rail-less catwalk running across the middle. It can rotate to form a bridge, but the controls on this side are shot. Its forty feet to that and forty feet from that to the 'island'.

MAL
Hard to get to. That's a fact.

He looks over and some ten feet to his right there is a conveyance, a large metal bucket -- big enough for a man -- on a pulley chain. Mal rushes to it. He pulls the chain and the bucket swings out over the chasm.

MAL
(continuing)
Bit more like it...

He heaves the chain to bring the bucket back -- and it snaps, the bucket falling into the crushing jaws of machinery.

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

One of the Reavers jumps over the barricade and engages Zoe -- she fights with trained precision and puts him down, blade in his own gut, but is tackled by another.

Book grabs a big weapon and comes up firing like a precision machine, cold fury on his face. One gets close to him and slices his face -- he puts it down before the blood fills his vision and he stumbles back and falls.

KAYLEE
Book! Book's down!

Jayne jumps up and grabs one of the crates, lifts it with impossible strength and ramrods though the bunch of them, blocking the door with it and turning to fight more of them, as animal as they.

JAYNE
You like that? you want some of that? **You picked the wrong gorramn restaurant, you rutters!**

ANGLE: ZOE

She's on her back, just holding off the Reaver, its blade and teeth inching towards her...

ZOE
Honey...

Wash turns and blasts the thing instantly. It flies off her.

ZOE
(continuing; pointedly)
Thank you...

WASH
I was busy with a thing.

They pop back up, firing.

ANGLE: SIMON AND INARA

They've come forward, are pulling Book to safety --

BOOK
I can't see!

Simon stops to shoot an approaching Reaver.

INARA
You're gonna be fine!

ANGLE: WASH AND ZOE

Still firing.

ZOE
Jayne! Fall back! NOW!

WASH
How many do you think there are?

ZOE
Enough.

They exchange a look. And Zoe takes a bullet in the shoulder. Wash stares for a moment, uncomprehending, as she falls -- then returns fire, screaming:

WASH
Simon!

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - LATER

Mal makes his way, hand over hand, along the horizontal ladder. Legs swinging out over the abyss. He's only just about to reach the first catwalk and he's in a lot of sweaty pain.

He hears a clatter behind him and he swings himself, jumps for the catwalk as laser-fire grazes his side and blasts all around him.

He rolls, comes up to find Jude facing him, blaster recharging, cold fury etched on his face.

MAL
Shooting a little wild there, Judy. I haven't made you angry, have I?

JUDE
There's a lot of innocent people in the air being killed right now.

MAL
You have no idea how true that is and since when did you give the crack of an ass for innocent folk?

There's no wise-ass attitude in him now.

MAL
(continuing)
I know the secret, boy. And you can cover your ears and hum all you like but the rest of the 'verse is gonna know it too. 'cause they need to.

JUDE
You really believe that?

MAL
I do.

JUDE
You willing to die for that belief?

MAL
I am.

Jude raises his gun -- but Mal draws faster, shoots the gun out of Jude's hand and gets two hits to the chest (armored) and one graze on the head before Jude makes it to cover.

MAL
(continuing)
Of course, that ain't exactly plan A...

He drops out his cartridge and slams another in fast as thinking it.

ANGLE: JUDE is behind some machinery, wiping the blood from his temple. He attempts to peek out at Mal -- and two more shots send him scrambling back to cover, thinking.

Mal holsters his gun and jumps for the rung above him, starts going hand over hand to the island, moving as fast as he can.

Jude sees his moment, dives for his gun -- but it's been ruined by Mal's shot. Jude looks over at the struggling Mal with death in his eyes. He runs at the railing, vaults off it, and grabs a chain -- it snaps, swings him to the catwalk. He jumps off and starts going hand over hand -- but not on the rungs Mal is struggling with. His way is more dangerous, less reliable, and faster.

He reaches Mal and double kicks him from behind -- Mal flies off the rung but grabs a chain -- he tries to swing around to kick at Jude, but Jude is frikkin' Tarzan here, he climbs up and pulls a lever releasing one end of Mal's chain -- and Mal goes swinging, smacks into the side of the wall six feet below the platform.

He scrambles up just as Jude swings himself toward the platform from above.

INT. BLACK ROOM/INNER CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

Kaylee is peppered with dart-like projectiles. She screams and drops her weapon, pulling the projectiles from her -- Inara helps her up, pulls her back as Zoe shouts:

ZOE
Everybody fall back! Fall back!
(to Wash)
The doors --

He moves inside to the control panel as everyone else stumbles or is dragged into the inner corridor.

The doors start to close, from each side and above and below. Then, when the hole is maybe four feet by four feet, they stop.

WASH
<shit on this.>

He moves to the control panel -- and a small, home-made device is tossed through, bounces off the floor...

INARA
Wash!

She rushes forward as he dives back -- and both are almost caught in the little bomb's blast, go flying and fall badly. From their moaning, they look to live.

SIMON
The doors...

ANGLE: they are still open. Whip from them to see the control panel blown out.

ZOE
Jayne! Grenade!

JAYNE
I got just the one...

He tosses it through the hole. Zoe doesn't even flinch from the blast as she thinks.

ZOE
They're gonna get in --

WASH
(louder than he needs to be)
The outside panel! It can be closed from out there!

ZOE
No one's coming back from that...

She tries to stand, fails.

ZOE
(continuing)
How much ammo do we have?

JAYNE
We got three full cartridges and my swingin' cod. That's all.

Inara is by the elevator, pounding for it to come.

INARA
Lift isn't moving...

ZOE
When they come, try to plug the hole with 'em...

JAYNE
What about her?

He points at River, still by herself, still uninvolved.

WASH
That's right! Isn't she some kind of killing machine?

JAYNE
The trigger! In the cartoon! We gotta do that! Make her all... killy!

RIVER
A machine...

She looks down at her gun.

Jayne shoots the first Reaver that tries to get through. He looks at River, bobbing his head and happily singing:

JAYNE
FRUITY OATY BARS, HEY! WOW! FRUITY BARS, MAKE A MAN OF A MOUSE...

SIMON
(still with Book)
The trigger's not in the **song**, you croton.

JAYNE
(quietly)
Well, now I know that.

RIVER
No more triggers...

Kaylee cries out and Simon moves to her.

KAYLEE
I'm starting to lose some feeling here... I think there's something in them darts they throwed at me.

SIMON
Lie still.

KAYLEE
This is probably a weird time to bring it up, but I got a terrible crush on you.

He smiles at her.

SIMON
I'm gonna give you something to counteract the --

He stands, looking around him. His bag is over by Book.

SIMON
(continuing)
My bag.

and **SHKOWW!**, the bullet takes him in the belly -- everything suddenly moving very slowly as he spins slightly, one foot lifted, a confused expression on his face -- then speeding right back up as he slams down on his back, gasping for air.

River's mouth opens in a scream she doesn't make.

Blood spreads from Simon's belly - this is the worst wound yet.

Inara rushes to him, as does Wash.

INARA
Keep pressure on it!

SIMON
Need... adrenaline... and a shot of calaphar for Kaylee... NOT that much pressure... I can't... River...?

She is by his side. Takes his hand, the others working but giving the two of them their space. She has a kind of serenity to her, like she understands something now.

SIMON
(continuing)
River... I'm sorry...

RIVER
No. No.

The lights go out, leaving the place terribly dim. Everyone looks about them. Jayne fires again at the entry, but all the sound has bled out save these two.

SIMON
I hate to... leave...

RIVER
You won't. You take care of me, Simon. You've always taken care of me.

She stands as the emergency lights come on, giving her face an unearthly glow as she looks down at him.

RIVER
(continuing)
My turn.

She's running so fast, nobody has time to react til she **DIVES** through the hole in the doors, then Simon SCREAMS her name, the scream following us back into the Black Room where River land in a perfect roll, comes up in a room full of Reavers.

Without a moment's hesitation she makes it to the panel, gets the doors closing. She dodges a blade, but a blow to the back of the head shakes her. She weaves around a couple of Reavers to get to the closing doors, but at the last second her ankle is grabbed and pulled out from under her.

the last thing we see is her being dragged back as they swarm over her.

ANGLE: THE BLAST DOORS

As they shut with a shuddering **KLUNNG**.

Simon tries to cry out her name again, but can't get the breath.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal gets up the chain to the platform. Jude is on Mal before he gets his footing, tackles him as Mal's gun goes skittering over the edge into oblivion. There is a railing here or Mal would go over as well -- but he comes back with a couple of hammer blows, gets Jude off him.

They square off, Mal stumbling back into a tool chest, knocking over tools and computer parts.

Jude reaches behind him and pulls his sword gracefully from the holster under his jacket. It extends to full length.

Mal gracefully produces his weapon: a tiny screwdriver. It doesn't extend so much as just sit.

JUDE
This hardly seems fair.

MAL
Such is life.

He hurls a toolbox at Jude and rushes him, gets inside sword range and tries for the neck with the screwdriver -- Jude blocks it and works the sword point against the edge of Mal's stomach. Starts pushing slowly, despite Mal's resistance, and breaks skin. Mal looks at Jude a moment -- and Jude slides the sword all the way through Mal's belly. Mal's eyes go wide.

JUDE
You know what your sin is, Mal?

MAL
(shaky smile)
Aw hell, I'm a fan of all seven.

He headbutts Jude viciously then punches him so hard he staggers back, losing his grip on the sword. Jude instantly responds with a dazzling spin kick -- Mal holds up the screwdriver and Jude swings his foot right into it, gasping as Mal pulls the screwdriver -- and Jude's leg -- back as he rockets his fist forward into Jude's chin.

Jude goes down hard, dazed, as Mal grabs the sword still in his belly.

MAL
(continuing)
But right now...

He pulls the sword out, grimacing. Holds it over Jude. The smile gone.

MAL
(continuing)
I'm gonna have to go with Wrath.

He stabs down at Jude's face -- but Jude rolls out of the way, kicks Mal from the ground and is up in a second, grabbing Mal's sword hand -- the sword drops -- and punching him repeatedly in his stomach wound. Mal doubles over -- then brings his head back up in a backwards headbutt to Jude's chin. Jude staggers back, and the two of them rush each other again, more animal than ever --

INT. INNER HALL - CONTINUING

The gang is subdued -- because they are all of them injured and Simon is slipping away. Jayne looks about him at clanging noises.

JAYNE
I can still hear 'em.

WASH
If the elevator comes back we --

ZOE
(nodding to Simon)
We can't move him.

Wash drops back onto his elbow, defeated. Book speaks up from his corner, still unable to see...

BOOK
You suppose he got through? Think Mal got the word out?

ZOE
(almost convincingly)
He got through. I know he got through.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal goes down hard from a blow, spitting up blood. He sees the sword, moves -- but Jude kicks him in the face. Picks him up, Mal trying to punch but losing steam -- which Jude shows no sign of doing.

JUDE
I'm sorry.

Jude spins him and **DIGS** his bunched fingers right into the same nerve cluster that he paralyzed Doctor Mathias with. Mal goes rigid, his face a rictus of pain, leaning slightly back against the plastic partition in front of the console.

Jude goes near the railing and retrieves his sword. Mal trembles with the effort of trying to move -- but nothing happens.

JUDE
(continuing)
You should know there's no shame in this. You've done remarkable things. But you're fighting a war you've already lost.

He lunges -- and Mal twists gracefully out of the way, grabbing Jude's swordhand and pulling it forward -- while driving his elbow into Jude's neck with staggering force.

MAL
Well, I'm known for that.

Jude drops the blade, mouth open, stumbling back, unable to make a sound.

Mal spins him, grabbing both his arms and working his own through them in a twisted full nelson - then bringing his arms up suddenly, Jude's mouth going wider as we hear his arms crack.

Mal drops him sitting against the railing, picks up his sword, saying:

MAL
(continuing)
Piece a shrapnel tore up that nerve cluster my first tour of duty. I had it moved. You special ops types always go for that sucker, too.

He squats down, looks Jude in the face.

MAL
(continuing)
Sorry 'bout the throat. Expect you'd wanna say your famous last words now. Just one trouble.

He reaches over the railing, pulls the back of Jude's jacket through and shoves the sword through the fabric, pinning Jude in his sitting position.

MAL
(continuing)
I ain't gonna kill you.

He moves to the console, starts prepping it.

MAL
(continuing)
Hell, I'm gonna grant your greatest wish.

He inserts the cylinder, turns it slightly. It hums to life.

MAL
(continuing)
I'm gonna show you a world without sin.

He hits "send". The cylinder lights up and the broadcast begins. Here it is projected as a two-dimensional image on the clear plastic partition, right in front of Jude.

There are image first of the city -- of bodies, on the street, in homes and offices.... image after image.

CARON (V.O.)
These are some of the first sites we scouted on Miranda. There is no one living on this planet. There is no one...

Mal hits the controls from this side and the catwalk begins to rotate so he can get across. He never even looks at Jude.

On Jude, watching...

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

CLOSE ON: A Reaver in EXTREME SLOW MOTION. Face full of fury, he is swinging his blade in a frenzy of hate.

And a small hand smashes that face so hard that teeth fly -- the Reaver clearing frame to reveal:

River.

She is bloodied, but not killed. She is just like we saw her before in trigger mode -- moving faster and more efficiently than anyone can, ducking and weaving and gutting and kicking and there are piles of Reavers already, she never breaks concentration as she uses their own blades against them, throws them, does everything in her power to stay one step ahead of -- or above -- the mob.

But she gets cut -- a deeper gash than the scrapes that run along her arms and legs. She stumbles -- but only for a second, gathering herself and countering even as the world gets warpy in her eyes.

She slams backwards into a wall opposite the blast doors -- and a grappling hook punches through it, just missing her.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Jude watches the end of the broadcast. We are on his face through the plastic, so the images blur right before him, the Reaver, Dr Caron -- and her screaming doesn't stop til something is shoved in her mouth.

INT. INNER HALL - CONTINUING

The gang is still trying to patch themselves together when the elevator doors open. Mal staggers out, holding his bleeding side.

ZOE
Sir?

MAL
It's done.

Everyone who can take that in, does.

MAL
(continuing)
Report?

Zoe looks at the badly wounded Simon, is about to give a report --

The doors start to open behind her.

Everyone turns to look, those who can feebly raising weapons, as the square iris of the opening bast door widens to reveal River, standing alone. She is holding two Reaver blades, is bloody but unbowed. And the only one alive.

We hold on her a moment, then the wall behind her is **ripped completely away.**

Behind it, grappling hooks chained to a huge tractor pull the wall away as a group of Reavers come right at the room, screaming -- and are **mowed down** from behind.

Mal moves forward, those who can stand do, and River slowly turns as the shooting continues until there's nothing but dead Reavers and smoke.

Through the smoke come some fifteen fully armored Alliance soldiers, who line up, rifles trained on our gang...

SOLDIER
Drop your weapons!

OTHER SOLDIER
Drop 'em now!

SOLDIER
Do we shoot? Do we shoot?

River lets the blades fall from her hands. The others put their guns down.

The soldiers are amped and clearly confused, shouting over each other:

SOLDIER
(continuing)
They're not Reavers!

ANOTHER SOLDIER
We have a kill order on these people!

YET ANOTHER
Hold on! Hold on!

OTHER SOLDIER
These rutters brought the Reavers down on us!

SOLDIER
Do we have the order?

CLOSE ON: RIVER

As she stares down a SOLDIER, who tightens the grip on his rifle...

JUDE (O.S.)
(coming through their helmets)
Stand down.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Jude has managed to lift his arm enough to speak into his palmcom. There is a world of weariness in his voice:

JUDE
This is command order Jupiter Eagle, the situation is cold. The civilians are not to be harmed.

INT. STORAGE CHAMBER/BLACK ROOM/INNER HALL - CONTINUING

Our gang can hear him from the dozen or so helmet mics:

JUDE
Repeat: the civilians are not be harmed. Contain the Reavers and get medics to the civilian wounded right now.

ANGLE: THE SOLDIER'S TRIGGER FINGER

Squeezes inadvertently, we hear a small click --

And it eases off.

Medics come rushing in as River drops gracefully to the ground, exhausted. One looks to her, two more rushing to Simon and the others.

MEDIC
(to Kaylee)
Move aside, please. He'll be all right, we'll handle this.

They talk medic talk as Mal hobbles over to Inara, sits by her. She rests her head on his shoulder as he looks at Zoe.

MAL
Report?

ZOE
No friendly casualties, sir. Everybody coming home.

Mal rests, satisfied. Looks at Inara.

MAL
I told you.

INARA
You told us we would all die.

MAL
Well, I knew I told you something...

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

We see Jude in profile, still sitting, the camera moving slowly away from him. He is very much alone.

EXT. REPAIR YARD, PERSEPHONE - DAY

It is raining softly as we look out at the city, panning over to find a newly patched up Serenity, Mal finishing a weld job on her side. He steps back to look, then heads around the front and onto the ramp, dumping his equipment.

JUDE
I can't believe that thing is still flying.

Mal turns and there Jude stands, at the bottom of the ramp. His clothes more casual than we've ever seen, his whole demeanor changed.

MAL
She'll fool you that way. They make 'em faster now, and prettier. But no boat can hold like a Firefly.

JUDE
Nothing is what it seems.
(gathering himself)
River and Simon Tam are no longer on the Enemy List. They can go wherever they please, do what they like. I have explained to the Military Command that there is no further threat.

MAL
Good. What about you?

JUDE
At some point they'll discover how entirely I failed in this. I expect they'll be sending someone after me. Someone very much like me.
(a wan smile)
So I'll try to disappear, before I... disappear.

MAL
Wise course.
(beat)
I see you again, you know that I'll kill you.

JUDE
That's reasonable.

Mal turns to go back on the ship. Hits the button for the inner doors, which start closing between him and Jude.

JUDE
(continuing)
It won't make any difference, you know. People knowing... the Alliance won't crumble, governments won't stop human experimentation, the race of man won't suddenly become more caring and involved... nothing is going to change.

MAL
You did.

The doors shut between them. The ramp begins to close as well, and Jude walks slowly away.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Mal turns to see Simon and River standing behind him. Simon has his arm around River, and both seem very at ease.

SIMON
Who was that?

MAL
Man looking for directions. How about you two? You need directions, or have you figured out where it is you wanna be.

SIMON
We've figured it out.

RIVER
Simon figured it out.
(looking off, smiling faintly)
I already knew.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Kaylee is working alone, limping slightly. Simon enters, also moving carefully. Kaylee tries to avoid his eye as he leans on the engine near her.

KAYLEE
You talk to the Captain? 'Bout where you're heading?

SIMON
I did.

KAYLEE
Well that's good. How long do you all figure it'll take to get there?

SIMON
Well, I had to walk up the stairs, that took longer than usual. Then there was the little corridor there, fairly uneventful, and here I stand. Here I lean.

She turns, wetness filling her eyes, as he smiles at her.

KAYLEE
You don't mean...

SIMON
I really do.

KAYLEE
And am I any part of your --

SIMON
You really are.

She smiles, could light up a city. They kiss, and about time too. She pulls back, breathless.

KAYLEE
Oh Doctor, you and me is gonna have such an awful lot of sex...

He tries to reply. He does try.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Inara, Book, Zoe, Wash and Jayne are all in mid-discussion.

BOOK
It's just people. The way of people. We create horrors out of kindness, we do great works through violence and fear.

INARA
It does occasionally work the other way as well.

BOOK
I'm glad to say.

MAL
Is this another exciting talk over the nature of man? 'cause if I'd'a known doing what's right was gonna turn this boat into a philosophy class I mighta thought twice.

BOOK
We've faced the unimaginable. Get off our backs.

MAL
Well, we got things to do. Got to get Inara back to the Training House as soon as possible.

INARA
Why soon? Or, I mean, good.

MAL
Well I thought we might set there a spell. As I recall, there's some friends of yours in a tight spot. A General Obun breathing down their necks. And maybe we could help with that.

INARA
Oh. So you're not in a hurry to...

MAL
(smiling)
Ain't you the skittish one.

JAYNE
Well, that's great! I'm warming up to the idea of spending our days helping out poor, defenseless whores.

INARA
(sooo many times...)
Companions.

JAYNE
Uh-huh. Point is, we're heroes now. We faced down Reavers, the mighty Alliance, and opened the eyes of the world to injustice.
(more)

JAYNE (cont'd)
If that don't get me some quinny, I swear I'm turning eunuch like the Shepherd over here.

Book's expression is memorable. Zoe puts her hand to her heart.

ZOE
That was beautiful.

WASH
(matching her mock sentiment:)
I have something in my eye...

Mal and Inara ignore the others. She speaks so quietly...

INARA
Thank you, Mal.

MAL
Thank me later.
(louder)
Wash, you don't mind, I'm gonna take her out.

ZOE
Sure you remember how?

MAL
(points up)
Sky's that way, yeah?

WASH
Don't change my settings.
(to Zoe)
He always changes my settings.

Mal exits to the bridge.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal eases himself into his seat. Takes a moment, then looks to his left.

River is in the copilots seat, looking intently at the screens and buttons.

MAL
You gonna ride shotgun, help me fly?

RIVER
That's the plan.

MAL
Think you can help get her in the air --

She is flipping switches without even looking, as the ship hums to life.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As her engines fire up and tilt, and she lifts gently off the ground.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal looks slightly, only slightly nonplussed.

MAL
Okay, clearly some aptitude for the... but it ain't all buttons and charts, <little albatross>. You know what the first rule of flying is? Well, I suppose you do, since you already know what I'm about to say.

RIVER
I do. But I like to hear you say it.

He looks out at the rain on his windows, at his screens, taking her up as he says:

MAL
Love. You can learn all the math in the 'verse, but you take a boat in the air you don't love, she'll shake you off just as sure as the turning of worlds. Love keeps her in the air when she oughta fall down, tells you she's hurting 'fore she keens. Makes her a home.

River also looks out at the sky.

RIVER
Storm's getting worse.

MAL
We'll pass through it soon enough.

He pulls back on the steering column, feeling her go.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As we shoot up with her through sheeting rain, towards the top of the sky.

EXT. SPACE - MOMENTS LATER

We are looking down on the stormclouds as Serenity bursts out of them, comes at us, flared by the sun behind the planet as she passes us, her Firefly effect lighting up, about to shoot off into the heavens --

There is a spark and a piece of paneling pops off, whips at camera, blacking out the frame.

MAL (O.S.)
What was that?

THE END